From Radishes to Realization

Saraha and His Impact on the Mahāmudrā Tradition

of the Tibetan Karma Kagyü School

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Preface

The whole world is word bound -
Nobody gets past words;
But resist words,
And you'll get past words.

- Saraha[1]

The Indian mystic Saraha, a master wordsmith who composed and sang poetic songs of realization, was the spiritual father of the mahāmudrā meditation tradition. His colorful play with words aimed at nothing less than the wordless experience of the exalted natural mind--the realization of mahāmudrā. Many words have been written about this man who dwells in a world "past words." Tibetan scholars such as Pawo Tsuklak Trengwa (1504-1566), Karma Trinlaypa (1456-1539) and Pema Karpo (1527-1592) have composed narratives about his life. His songs have been translated from Indian languages into Tibetan, and commentaries have been written about them. Some of these have been made available for Western audiences by the efforts of scholars Herbert Guenther and Kurtis Schaeffer. Guenther translated Karma Trinlaypa and Kyeme Dechen's commentaries to the *King's Dohā*; and Schaeffer worked on the commentary on the *People's Dohā* by Chomden Raldri (1227-1305). Saraha's *Trilogy of Songs* has been translated several times, in part or completely, by Muhammad Shahidullah; Herbert Guenther; David Snellgrove; Roger Jackson; and Kurtis Schaeffer. However, there is more to discover about the writings of the "Great Brahmin," as Saraha is often called. The majority of his

[1] Saraha's verse 88 of the People's Dohā, in Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 103.

compositions, which are part of the Tibetan canon, have not been explored. Lara Braitstein translated Saraha's second great trilogy, *The Adamantine Songs*, and Kurtis Schaeffer integrated some of the shorter songs in his book, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin*.

Still, Saraha's role has more facets to explore. He was not only an eccentric poet, but a mahāmudrā master--according to some, the very first in history. He is venerated to this day by practitioners of the Karma Kagyü School as a personification of the highest spiritual goal: Mahāmudrā, which is enlightenment itself. The Great Brahmin's words appear in meditation manuals, prayers and liturgies. He is like a thread woven into the cloth of mahāmudrā literature.

In this text I attempt to follow these traces of Saraha from his Indian sources into the mahāmudrā tradition of Tibet. My research will focus on his impact on the Karma Kagyü School, which is one of the strongholds of mahāmudrā.

Chapter One serves as an introduction to Saraha and a general overview of the mahāmudrā tradition. This sets the stage for exploring Saraha's role within the tradition. Relying on the previous research of Western scholars, I try to give a simplified, and therefore clearer but perhaps less precise, picture of the complexity of Saraha's life and work. In regards to his role as a founding father of the mahāmudrā tradition, I interpret what is reported of his life as a dialectic, the story of the struggle between a charismatic leader and the institution that follows his example. Saraha fights against the stifling religious conventions of his day and his innovations are later absorbed into the tradition, making them mainstream. The section on mahāmudrā expounds the historical development of the tradition and introduces the reader to its basic texts, its schools, its systematizations and principal methods.

Chapter Two presents Saraha's work in the Tibetan canon and the Caryāpāda. Twenty-six texts have been preserved in the tantra section of the Tengyur, and four poems have been found

in an Indian song collection, written in a Bengali vernacular, Apabhraṃśa. These works are listed with their original titles, and wherever possible, I offer a short summary. Based on this material, I analyze Saraha's poetic style, particularly in respect to the recension of his work in Tibetan mahāmudrā literature. The chapter concludes with my translation of the *Dohākoṣa Mahāmudrā Upadeśa,* an exemplary little poetic song of mahāmudrā instructions by Saraha. To my knowledge, this text is the first translation of the dohā, and it is an excellent example of the Great Brahmin's teaching and his poetic style.

Chapter Three traces Saraha's influence in two major works of the Karma Kagyü meditation literature. It will be shown where he is cited as an authority, and where his particular style was later superseded by subsequent reforms in the tradition. These meditation manuals are still actively used in the practice of present-day Buddhists, both in the East and the West.

Chapter Four examines the role of Saraha in the actual meditation practice of the Karma Kagyü School today. The context for this examination is the traditional three-year retreat, as it is currently carried out in Dhagpo Kundrol Ling in the Auvergne, France. After presenting the prayers and liturgies in which Saraha is venerated, I describe the scenario of a gaṇacakra feast offering, in which Saraha's songs are read in translation as a way to reenact the old yogic tradition of singing spontaneous songs of realization. Having given a full picture of Saraha's presence in the life of a practitioner, I analyze his impact and importance for the Western meditator. I interviewed a half-dozen practitioners who have accomplished one or two cycles of three-year retreats in France; I also interviewed a young lineage holder, the 4th Dilyag Sabchu Rinpoche, who was raised and educated in Nepal and lives now in the United States. Their statements reveal some challenges Western Buddhists face in understanding and adopting Saraha's teachings.

The research shows, however, that Saraha's words have remained influential for more than a millennium despite the fact that there are comparatively few concrete traces of his historical existence. Over time, the Great Brahmin has become more than a poet or a founder of a meditation tradition. For Buddhist practitioners, he is the personification of enlightenment, or mahāmudrā, or simply "mind;" contact with his teachings or his visualized form is believed to convey spiritual inspiration and blessing. The third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje (1284-1339) gives words to this view in a verse that echoes Saraha's poetry in a sensitive way.

> Listen you noble sons,
> The master, the Great Brahmin
> Is mind itself.
> And to search elsewhere is, alas, a mistake![2]

[2] Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 42.

Chapter One

1.1. Introduction to Saraha

Saraha is an enigma, whose impact on Buddhism can be seen in many different ways.

Tibetan and Western scholars alike, who have gone to some depth in the research about Saraha's life, all came to the conclusion that it is impossible to state with any historical certainty when and where he lived.[3] Some texts present Saraha alternately as a student of Buddha Śākyamuni's son Rāhula,[4] instructor of the famous second century philosopher Nāgārjuna, or place his life centuries later in the Pāla dynasty. Western scholarship has only been able to narrow the dates of Saraha's life between the third and the twelfth century, and place him in the east, north or south of India. One scholar suggests that we cannot even affirm with certainty if Saraha existed at all.[5] Some have suggested that there were at least two Sarahas - Saraha the elder, and Saraha the younger.[6] Furthermore, it is believed that Saraha appears with more than one name. He is sometimes simply called the "great brahmin." And he is also called Rāhulabhadra. This is the name he received supposedly as an ordination name from his mentor, Buddha Śākyamuni's son Rāhula.

Determining the life dates of Saraha is additionally complicated by the fact that there are Tibetan scholars who claim that for a completely realized person such as Saraha ordinary human limitations do not exist. These scholars, steeped in the tradition of their religious beliefs, claim that *mahāsiddhas* have transcended the realm of conventional reality, including notions of time, space and lifespan, and consequently can live 500 years or more.[7] *Mahāsiddhas* are, by definition, beyond birth and death. In the course of oral teachings delivered in Dhagpo Kagyü

[3] Ibid., 14-15: citing Tāranātha. Herbert Guenther, *Ecstatic Spontaneity,* 3. Also mentioned by Shahidullah, *Chants Mystiques*, and Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*.
[4] Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 29, 49-56.
[5] Ibid., 14.
[6] Tāranātha in Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin*, 32.
[7] See Pema Karpo's Hagiography of Saraha, cited in Schaeffer, *Ibid.,* 29.

Ling, France, the Tibetan scholar Khenpo Chödrak Tenphel (*mkhan po chos sgrag bstan 'phel*) expressed the view that trying to squeeze a *mahāsiddha* into the narrow framework of Western scholarship seemed like a violation of his spiritual accomplishments, as well as an insult to the traditional Tibetan Buddhist viewpoint.[8] This emic viewpoint receives some support from the Western scholar James Robinson, who cautions his colleagues against following unquestioningly the assumption that all events worldwide have to be measured according to common sense and rationality shaped by David Hume and his essay on miracles.[9] Robinson argues that common sense is "by definition founded on the experience of ordinary people,"[10] and cannot do justice to the reality of people "with altered or expanded states of consciousness."[11] Such people are not unique to Buddhism; he points out they can be found in religions all over the world.

In Tibetan Buddhist literature, the different tales of Saraha exist side-by-side, and all enjoy great popularity. Contradictions between versions may have caused less of a problem to Tibetan Buddhist scholars and practitioners than to Westerners. The reason for this can be found in the meaning and purpose of a life story in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. They were hagiographies, not biographies.[12] The Saraha-scholar Kurtis Schaeffer talks about the "genealogy of Saraha hagiographies in Tibet"[13] rather than trying to justify one or the other theory about historical data. He traces eleven hagiographic tales, which he discusses extensively in his book.[14] The four earliest versions relate that Saraha encounters a female arrow smith who becomes his tantric teacher and companion. These tales translate Saraha's name as the "arrow-shooter." Two

[8] Tibetan scholar of the Karma Kagyü School, Khenpo Chödrak Tenpel gave explanation orally at a lecture in Dhagpo Kagyü Ling, France, in the summer of 2002. No written sources are available. Although Khenpo Chödrak is renowned as the head scholar of that particular Tibetan Buddhist branch, it is not known to which extent his view represents the entirety of Tibetan scholarship.
[9] Hume, "Of Miracles," in *Inquiry into Human Understanding*, 399.
[10] Robinson, "The Lives of Indian Buddhist Saints," 64.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 14. He cites Michel de Certeau, *The Writings of History*, 270.
[13] Ibid., 15.
[14] Ibid.

centuries later appeared the narrative of the radish girl, which became the most popular story related to Saraha. Some of the later versions establish Saraha as a monastic lineage holder. The texts which contain Saraha-tales are, chronologically:

1. Balpo Asu's (*bal po a su/ skye med bde chen,*) commentary to the King Dohā, 12th century.[15]
2. Lodro Senge (Parbuwa)'s (*blo gros seng ge, spar bu ba*) commentary to the King Dohā, 12th century.[16]
3. The commentary on the *Treasury of Dohā Verses* by Advaya Avadhūti*,* (*gnyis med avadhūti*) ~11-13th century.[17]
4. Karma Trinlaypa's (*karma 'phrin las pa*, 1456-1539) account; it is the richest of all versions of Saraha's life story.
5. The *Lives of the Eighty-Four Spiritual Adepts* by Abhayadattaśrī (*mi 'jigs pa sbyin pa dpal*), maybe 14th century. This version makes mention for the first time of the famous radish girl narrative, omitting any mention of an arrow smith woman.
6. The *Golden Rosary of the Kagyu Masters* by Kunga Rinchen (*kun dga' rin chen*, 1475-1527).[18] This is a combination of the Saraha stories of Abhayadatta and Balpo Asu, combined into one story.
7. The *History of the Three Ordination lineages*[19] by Drakpa Dorje Palzangpo (*grags pa rdo rje pal bzang po*, b. circa 1444). The author inverses the order of events in Saraha's life: he is first a *tantrika*, and only later ordained as a monk.

[15] Ibid., 19.
[16] Ibid., 20.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid., 24.
[19] Ibid., 32, and 49 ff.

8. The *Tales of dohā lineages,* 16th century.[20] Pema Karpo (*padma dkar po*, 1527-1592) doubts the authenticity of these tales, calling them "a fabrication."[21]
9. Saraha's biography by Pema Karpo (1527-1592). It is very different from all previous versions. Saraha is ordained by Rāhula, lives 500 years, and becomes the teacher of Nāgārjuna.
10. The *Scholar's Feast*, 1565 by Tsuklak Trengwa (*gtsug lag phren ba*, 1504-1566). It mentions Saraha's ordination and subsequent joining with the arrow smith woman.
11. The latest tale occurs in *Seven Currents of Oral Instruction,* a collection of Indian hagiographies by Tāranātha, around 1600. Tāranātha argues that there might have been two Sarahas, the elder and the younger; and that Saraha was not ordained as a monk/ abbot.[22]

This list exemplifies the amazing liberty that Tibetan scholars took when writing life stories. Biography in the Tibetan language is called *rnam thar*[23], which literally means "complete liberation." They were sources of inspiration for future generations of practitioners, combining exemplary stories of often eccentric personalities with hidden or explicit meditation instructions.

If we regard the various Saraha tales as metaphorical forms of teaching,[24] we may find four general recurring spiritual messages being conveyed, which illustrate the eternal tension between the charismatic leader and the institution.

1. The spiritual seeker breaks away from the established institution
2. The spiritual seeker needs to go through a dark valley - misunderstood, denigrated, and alone.

[20] Ibid., 30.
[21] Ibid., 26.
[22] Ibid., 32.
[23] Short for *rnam par thar pa.*
[24] See more in: Robinson, "The lives of Indian Buddhist Saints."

3. The charismatic spiritual practitioner convinces through his teaching - including magical powers, miracles, and oral instructions - and introduces new elements of spiritual practice for his contemporaries.
4. The charismatic leader himself is made part of the institution.

In the case of Saraha's hagiography, Saraha is depicted as someone who breaks away from his brahmanic caste by disregarding its rules. He drinks alcohol, associates with a low-caste woman, and mocks other brahmins' spiritual practice.[25] He becomes, in the true sense of the word, a heretic. Heresy comes from the Greek word *hairein*, which means "to choose." Saraha had to make a choice between the norms presented by the tradition into which he was born and his own spiritual convictions. Independently of any historicity, we find here a crucial spiritual instruction: A spiritual seeker finds truth through courageous thinking and acting, which always entails certain consequences, such as social upheaval or temporary alienation. The founders of all great religions went through these acts of "heresy" and a subsequent phase of isolation. This element of the story might therefore be intended as a teaching for all sincere seekers to follow Saraha's courageous example.

Saraha then faces a time of desolation and denigration.[26] He is attacked by his fellow brahmins, who want to see him punished and expelled.[27] The King puts him on trial, and Saraha has to prove his spiritual integrity. This again can be seen as an instruction to the spiritual seeker to accept the fact of being misunderstood and criticized as part of the spiritual path. In some versions Saraha wanders off alone, or with his companion, into the unknown.[28] Cutting one's

[25] Criticizing the brahmins: opening verse of the People's Dohā: Roger R. Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 53. Saraha breaks the brahmin lore: Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 17.
[26] Berger, *The Heretical Imperative*, 27 ff.
[27] In *Lives of the Eighty-Four Spiritual Adepts* by Abhayadattaśrī, we read, "The brahmins heard about it and banned together to bann him." Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin*, 17.
[28] Ibid.: "Saraha took a fifteen-year-old servant girl and traveled to another land. They stayed in a very remote place."

ties, isolation, and non-attachment are often taught as being inevitable parts of the yogic path. Saraha's life is shown as a proto-type display of yogic practice.

As a charismatic personality, Saraha convinces his critics by various means. In one version, he performs miracles;[29] in another, it is the persuasiveness of his eloquent songs of realization that change his audience's mind.[30] In ancient India, magical powers (*siddhi*) were seen as a sign of spiritual accomplishment. Buddhist texts warn their adepts, however, not to get fascinated by colorful magical performances.[31] The only *siddhi* worthwhile striving for is the highest *siddhi*, enlightenment. In any case, the stories tell us that the *siddhi*-performing Saraha is no longer denigrated but becomes worthy of worship. In his role as charismatic leader he is then able to introduce - or popularize - new elements into the religious landscape of his time.

A striking feature in the Saraha-tales is the role of a female teacher and companion. The narratives of the female arrow smith and of the radish girl are certainly the most popular and most memorized stories in connection with Saraha. Both women appear as spiritual instructors to Saraha. Upon seeing a young girl making arrows in a market,

> Saraha asked her: 'Young girl, are you a fletcheress?' She replied, 'Noble son, the intent of the Buddha can be understood through symbols and actions, not through words and texts.' At that, the symbolic purport of this ḍākinī came to life in his heart.[32]

The story unfolds to tell us that upon hearing instructions by this woman, Saraha spontaneously attains liberation and that the two stay together as tantric practitioners. This important encounter with a spiritual woman (or ḍākinī) is underlined by Saraha's name. Saraha

[29] Ibid. Saraha defies the elements; he does neither burn nor drown.
[30] He sings the three dohās of the dohākośa, known as King's-, Queen's-, and People's Dohā. Schaeffer, *Dreaming,* 22.
[31] Willice, *Enlightened Beings, Life Stories*, 22: "Now the Buddhist tantric practitioner's main goal is not to gain such powers but rather to win ultimate realization in this very life. This is the highest, the superior, siddhi or success. All other siddhis are subordinate; however the lesser siddhis are said to come by the way as one advances along the path...." See also White, *Tantra in Practice*, 591.
[32] Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 21.

means "He who shot the arrow," which has been interpreted as the one who "had sent the arrow of non-duality into the heart of duality."[33]

The other female who is inextricably associated with the Saraha legend is the woman who scolds Saraha, when he arises after twelve years of meditative absorptions to inquire about his radish stew which he had ordered before going into *samadhi*. She rebukes him when he suggests going into the mountains to meditate.

> A solitary body is not solitude. Being (mentally) solitary, away from the mental signifiers and concepts is the supreme solitude. Even though you were settled in trance for twelve years, you cannot sever this crude signifier, the concept of radishes, so what good will come of going to the mountains?[34]

Again the words of a woman serve as pointing-out instructions[35] of a guru, and Saraha is said to attain the great seal, mahāmudrā realization. Stories such as these with their explicit appreciation for a woman's role, might have given more weight to a tantric view point which emphasizes the importance of a female companion on the path to highest spiritual attainment. Saraha can be seen as a charismatic figure that popularizes such values.[36]

The fourth stage of the progression suggested here, is the obligatory integration of the charismatic leader into the established institution. The once innovative, revolutionary energy thereby becomes mainstream for future generations. In Saraha's legends we find this element in contradictory manifestations: Saraha becomes on the one hand a major representative of the yogic mahāmudrā lineage; and on the other hand, he is a representative of monasticism. He is established as a mahāmudrā authority, for example, in the tales that conclude with statements about his authorship of the three dohās, *People Dohā, Queen Dohā,* and *King Dohā.* His

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[33] Commentary by Karma Trinlepa: Tibetan translation for Saraha: *mda'-bsnun;* Guenther, *Ecstatic Spontaneity,* 6; ibid., 21.
[34] Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,*18.
[35] *ngo sprod* : pointing-out instruction, lit. to bring face to face with, to introduce.
[36] The discussion of the role of women in the context of tantric practice goes beyond the scope of this work. For further reading see White: *Tantra in Practice*, 2001. The notion of "Without karmamudra no mahāmudrā," is discussed by Dowman in "Woman as a Ḍākinī," *Skydancer*.

presentation of these three instructions in poetic form had the effect of liberating the entire audience and became later a part of the canonical scriptures.

> So singing, everyone was liberated, and the kingdom became empty. It is said that later the texts were written on palm leaves and spread after falling into the hands of two brother scribes.[37]

Saraha appears in some versions as the celibate abbot of Nālandā, given the name Rāhulabhadra; he meets his female companion, and leaves the monastic community, thereby breaking his monastic commitments. In *The Three Ordination Lineages* the order of these events is reversed, supposedly for the purpose of preserving the purity of the ordination lineage.[38] Whatever the version, Saraha has become a symbol of spiritual authority.

Saraha's story - or better, stories - are infinitely richer in symbolism than presented here. This introduction, however incomplete, argues for their consideration as symbolic narratives, that is, as myths. According to the words of Paul Ricœur, "myth is an irreplaceable way of expressing the essence of mystery."[39] Saraha does stand undoubtedly for the mystery of the mahāmudrā and the *siddha* tradition, uniting its human and superhuman elements. The variety of tales about him expresses only that he has been a spiritual hero for the most divergent groups of practitioners. James B. Robinson's words shed light on the often forgotten value and purpose of myths:[40]

> The vertical dimension of myth allows the saints to "humanize" the transcendent; they make the status of an enlightened being accessible to the human level. They give living focus for devotion. They exemplify spiritual triumph in ways understandable to those who still struggle. They give hope in the sense that if they were able to achieve their goal, so might the aspirant who makes the requisite effort. And the symbolic levels of the stories reveal how such a transition may take place. This value is transcendent in the sense that it does not depend upon historical accuracy.

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[37] Excerpt of Tsuklak Trengwa's account of Saraha's life. Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 22. Similar endings are found in other accounts as well: Karma Trinlaypa (Ibid.), or Kunga Rinchen's *Tales* (Ibid., 24).

[38] A thorough analysis of this topic and possible intentions of the author of such a version is given by Schaeffer, in Chapter 3 of his book, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 49-56.

[39] Haught, *What is Religion*? 21.

[40] Robinson: "The Lives of Indian Buddhist Saints," 66-67.

> But the horizontal dimension of history is not to be ignored. The claim of these stories to historicity anchors this vertical linking of spiritual success and the ordinary life. The saints represent continuity; they bind the great figures of the past to our own history-bound humanity. They are links in the chain of enlightened beings going back to the Buddha himself, the source of highest wisdom and the supreme teacher in the present age. By their insight and success, the Indian saints guarantee the value of the Dharma and preserve the purity of transmission. They legitimize lineages of spiritual masters living in times closer to our own. The fact that these masters link the present with the sacred past makes their historical existence very important. The alternative is a rupture in the tradition. So this genre derives its value not just from doctrine but also from its affirmation of the sacred in the process of history in which we all live.

Saraha, as he is known today through narratives and poems, exquisitely fulfills the purpose of a linking element, a bridge. He connects the superhuman element with the human dimension by being at once the performer of miracles and the man who gets scolded by his wife. He stands for the realization of the highest spiritual goal, and yet his story features all the elements of a human spiritual path, marked by struggle, isolation, marginalization, even denigration. These elements are neither uniquely Indian nor Buddhist. The story of his spiritual success shows him also as charismatic leader and an originator of a particular style of meditation: the mahāmudrā. A tradition is obviously more than the product of a single person. As we have seen, it is not possible to affirm with certainty the historical details of the emergence of the mahāmudrā tradition. Yet, retroactively, Tibetan scholars have praised Saraha for his outstanding role in establishing this tradition. Here again, Saraha fits the metaphor of a bridge. He connects the beginnings of the mahāmudrā tradition with the contemporary generation of scholars and practitioners. As will be shown throughout this work, Saraha's mahāmudrā instructions have been applied, preserved and transmitted from teachers to students through the centuries, from India to the Himālaya s and now to America and Europe.

The tradition of mahāmudrā has developed into a full-fledged meditation system with an extensive literature in the Tibetan canon and associated *sādhana*[41] practices. It enjoys enormous popularity in Tibetan Buddhism. To fully appreciate Saraha's role in its history, it will be helpful to give an overview of its development over time.

1.2. Introduction to Mahāmudrā

Mahāmudrā - in Tibetan chagya chenpo (*phyag gya chen po*) or short, chag chen - is the name of a meditation tradition that came into Tibet from north India in the early eleventh century. Mahāmudrā refers simultaneously to a philosophical view of reality, a methodical path of spiritual practice, as well as its highest spiritual goal, the realization of ultimate reality. The three schools of the new translation tantras (*gsar ma)* of Tibetan Buddhism - Kagyü (*bka' rgyud*), Sakya (*sa skya*) and Gelug (*dge lugs*) - adopted this meditation system and each developed their own particularities. The older school of the Nyingmapa (*rnying ma pa*) follows the meditation system of the great perfection, dzogchen, (*rdzog pa chen* po), which shows, however, close resemblance with the mahāmudrā tradition.[42]

The multivalent term mahāmudrā has been translated most commonly as "the great seal," but also as "the great embrace,"[43] or the "great imprint of reality," to name but a few possibilities. Tibetan scholars and meditation masters provided explanations of the term, using its Tibetan rendering, *phyag rgya chen po.* They condensed their understanding of ultimate reality in a few

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[41] sādhanam, "means to accomplish something," according to V. S. Apte. *A Practical Sanskrit Dictionary*. p. 979; Tib. *sgrub thabs*. Tantric liturgy, involving recitation, visualization, and meditation with the support of a mantra. It involves generation and completion phase practice with an emphasis on the former.
Also see: http://rywiki.tsadra.org/index.php/Sadhana_Practice.

[42] This was the topic of works such as the 19th century scholar Karma Chagme's *The Union of Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā.* (*karma chags med: thugs rje chen po'i dmar khrid phyag rdzogs zung 'jug thos pa don ldan*).

[43] Robert Thurman in Brown, *Pointing Out the Great Way,* xiii.

key terms.[44] The interpretations of the three parts making up the word, *chag*, *gya* and *chenpo*, vary to such an extent that more than technical terms to be interpreted, they resemble code words. In one of the interpretations, supposedly derived from the *Mahāmudrātilaka Tantra,*[45] the first syllable *chag* is the honorific term for hand, but also refers to sweeping and cleaning. As a symbol for cleansing sentient beings from their suffering, it is explained to symbolize emptiness, since the realization of emptiness is believed to have the described purifying power.[46] The second part, *gya,* of the word is explained as either the adjective "vast," or the noun meaning "seal" or "symbol." It is interpreted as the complementary aspect of emptiness - its innate (coemergent)[47] clarity or lucidity. This aspect of emptiness is said to be realized by "non-dual wisdom"[48] and thus, *gya* symbolizes this aspect of innate (coemergent), non-dual, primordial wisdom. The third part, *chenpo,* means "great" or "pervading," and refers to the all-pervading nature of mind.[49] *Chenpo* also refers to the union of skillful means (*upāya*) and wisdom (*prajñā*). It is praised as an absolute "great," beyond comparison.

1.2.1. History and Lineages

The philosophical roots of mahāmudrā go back to fourth and fifth century India with its buddha-nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) literature, such as the *Unsurpassed Continuum (Uttāratantra śāstra)* by Asaṇga/Maitreya. According to this doctrine, buddha nature, or the awakened wisdom mind, is the inborn potential of all sentient beings and is accessible in any and every experience, if properly recognized. Recognition can happen in two ways, either gradually or spontaneously,

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[44] Wangchuk Dorje, *Mahāmudrā Ozean des Wahren Sinnes*, 111 ff. And: *Mahāmudrā, Ocean of Definitive Meaning*, 271 ff.
[45] Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche in Wangchuk Dorje, *Mahāmudrā, Ocean of Definitive Meaning*, xxi.
[46] Thrangu, *Song for the King*, 16.
[47] innate and coemergent are alternative translations of the Tibetan *lhan cig skyes pa*
[48] Ibid., 14.
[49] Ponlop Rinpoche in Wangchuk Dorje, *Mahāmudrā, Ocean,* xxii.

depending on the karmic capacities of the individual. The earliest descriptions of gradual paths were inaugurated at the same time with Asaṇga's *Mahāyāna Sūtra Ornament* (*Mahāyānasutrālankāra)*, where the author subdivided the meditation progress in two basic stages, concentration or calm abiding (*śamatha, zhi gnas*) - and superior insight (*vipaśyanā, lhag mthong*). For the concentration phase he presents a "nine stages of tranquility"-model, and defines the dividing threshold between concentration and superior insight as the experience of *śūnyatā* - the emptiness of the natural mind. Gradual path manuals were not rare and became standardized in Tibetan mahāmudrā literature.[50]

Mahāmudrā practice also relies on the *Yogacāra* doctrine of the storehouse consciousness (*ālaya vijñāna*), as it is said to effect a transformation on three levels of consciousness. These are the gross, subtle and very subtle consciousness. The "very subtle level" refers to the storehouse consciousness, which holds all karmic imprints, including the most subtle notions of ego-identification. When these are uprooted by mahāmudrā practice, the storehouse consciousness dissolves and gives way to experiencing the "clear light of mind" (*'od gsal*).

During the Pāla dynasty in northeastern India of the eighth to twelfth century, the mahāmudrā tradition was in full bloom. Buddhism enjoyed the protection and patronage of many Pāla rulers; Buddhist monastic universities were established or revitalized; Buddhism was translated into the vernacular.[51] A group of wandering practitioners called *siddhas* propagated the teachings and introduced new, particularly tantric, elements. *Siddhas* were known for their eccentric behavior, the mastery of occult powers, their capacity to receive spiritual instructions directly from a *sambhogakāya* buddha in dreams or visions, and for their songs of realization

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[50] For example, Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje (*dbang phyug rdo rje*)*, The Profound Instructions on Coemergent Union: The Radiant Activity of the Essence of Definitive Meaning* (*lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi zab khrid nges don rgya mtsho'i snying po phrin las 'od 'phro*), or Tashi Namgyal (*bkra shis rnam rgyal*), *Moonbeams of Mahāmudrā* (*nges don phyag rgya chen po'i sgom rim gsal bar byed pa legs bshad zla ba'i 'od zer*).
[51] Brown, *Pointing Out the Great Way*, 16.

(*dohā*) - an essential pedagogical tool for meditation instruction. The lives and teachings of eighty-four *siddhas* were preserved for posterity due to the work by Indian Abhayadatta, *The Lives of Eighty-Four Spiritual Adepts*.[52] Their poetic songs of realization are the earliest sources of mahāmudrā teachings known today.

Given the non-institutionalized character of spiritual practice and lifestyle, it is not surprising that the various mahāmudrā masters used and taught different approaches to the realization of ultimate reality. A common feature to all, though, was the importance of the teacher-student relationship. Without the guru's "pointing-out instructions" of the correct view of the mind's natural state, the student could not set out on the spiritual path. Mahāmudrā masters also all agreed that the mind had to be cleansed of mental constructions, which they blamed for two basic human problems: they prevent a person from staying continuously aware, and they cause a person to relapse into selfish, reactive behavior.

Just how to obtain that state became a point of disagreement. Consequently, the *siddhas* developed different styles of mahāmudrā. Saraha, for example, acclaimed founding father of the mahāmudrā tradition,[53] is known for favoring a practice of minimal intervention. "This mind, so tightly bound - relax it, and you're free, no doubt;"[54] he repeats untiringly in his songs. The practice consists of preparing the right conditions so that recognition of the ultimate reality can happen. This is an art of *deconstruction* rather than construction, according to Saraha:

> Where comprehension's destroyed, thought dies and pride is split;
> There's utmost art of magic made - why bind it by meditation?[55]
>
> Oh! The adamantine suchness is difficult to realize.
> Not understanding this, mind exerts itself by running after words.
> It is difficult to meet that goal which is free of activity.[56]

[52] Translated by Keith Dowman as *Masters of Mahāmudrā* .
[53] Brown, *Pointing Out The Great Way,* 16.
[54] Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 78.
[55] Ibid., 83.
[56] *Body Treasury*, verse 11, trans, Braitstein, 201.

Free of activity, or *non-action,* are key terms in Saraha's approach to mahāmudrā. He challenges the viewpoint that regards meditation as a technique that involves "fabrication," training and effort. Moreover, spiritual practice should not be seen as an elitist occupation. "[L]iving at home with your wife--if enjoying things intently doesn't free you, Saraha says, how can consciousness be free?"[57] According to his teaching, the fundamental non-duality of mind can be, and should be, realized in the midst of daily activity. Saraha dismisses conventional religious practices such as philosophical studies, tantric ritual practice, or meditation of the progressive path style:

> No tantra, no mantra, no reflection or recollection -
> Hey, fool! All this is the cause of error.
> Mind is unstained - don't taint it with meditation;
> You're living in bliss: don't torment yourself.[58]

According to this approach to mahāmudrā, there is no need for concentration and superior insight practice. However, it has been pointed out by all Saraha-scholars that whatever we state about Saraha has to be taken with a grain of salt. Saraha's text collection is a work of later editors, and we can not be sure as to which degree their intentions and priorities, rather than Saraha's, are reflected in his work as we know it today.[59] Saraha's criticism of formal practice has to be understood in context.[60]

The *siddhas* Tilopa (988-1069), on the other hand, thought it indispensable that the student enter meditative absorption while receiving pointing out instructions, and therefore put great emphasis on the mastery of concentration according to the traditional gradual meditation path.[61] Yet another version of mahāmudrā developed with the Tibetan master Gampopa Sönam

[57] *Treasury of Couplets,* verse 19, trans, Jackson. *Tantric Treasures*., 63.
[58] *Treasury of Couplets,* verse 23, trans, Jackson. Ibid., 65.
[59] See Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 28-29.
[60] Saraha's position on meditation will be discussed further in Chapter Two.
[61] On the different approaches of meditation masters, see: Brown, *Pointing,* 17-21.

Rinchen (*sgam po pa bsod nams rin chen,* 1079-1153) in the twelfth century, who established a mahāmudrā path that was completely independent from the tantric path. For this innovation Gampopa earned sharp criticism.[62]

While Buddhism began to vanish from India in the twelfth century, mahāmudrā was transmitted to Tibet over a period of three hundred years, according to the *Blue Annals (deb gter sngon po).*[63] The author Gö Lotsawa Shönnu Pal (*'gos lo tsa ba gzhon nu dpal*, 1392-1481) maintained that "Saraha was the first to introduce the Mahāmudrā as chief of all paths."[64] Gö Lotsawa then traces two translation lineages from Saraha to Tibet, the source translation and the additional translation lineages. The source translation lineage progresses from Saraha to Śavari (or Śavara, end of tenth century), then to Maitrīpa (b.1007), from where it divides into three transmissions: the early, intermediate (upper and lower), and later transmissions. They included crucial figures such as Atiśa (982-1054), Vajrapani (b.1017) and Vairocana Rakśita (c. eleventh/twelfth centuries). The so called additional translation lineage[65] originated with Tilopa and Nāropa in India and was transmitted to Tibet by Marpa (*mar pa lo tsA ba chos kyi blo gros,* 1002/1012-1079), whose disciple Milarepa (*mi la ras pa,* 1040/52-1135) made the mahāmudrā teachings widely popular by means of his songs - a resumption of the Indian *dohā* tradition.

During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the mahāmudrā tradition was firmly integrated into the Kagyü tradition, principally through the efforts of Gampopa, founder of the Dhagpo (*dvags po,* or *dvags lha sgam po dgon pa*) monastery. He transformed the mahāmudrā teachings into "a special system of metaphysics and meditation."[66] This system, now known as sūtra mahāmudrā, could be practiced by monks, whose monastic vows made it impossible for them to

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[62] For more information see Braitstein, Chapter "Great Seal, Great Controversy," 98 ff.
[63] Translated by Roehrich as *The Blue Annals.*
[64] He gives rGod tshang pa as the source of this statement. Roehrich, *Blue Annals*, 841.
[65] Roehrich, *Blue Annals,* 843.
[66] Namgyal, xxxvii

practice the tantric version of mahāmudrā. Tantric *sādhana* practice required the adept to consume certain substances (alcohol) and to use sexual practice as a means to spiritual progress; both elements would mean breaking the monastic code and expulsion from the monastic community. Gampopa presented a gradual path, based on an ethical code and on the view of the coemergent union (*lhan cig skes sbyor*). This view, in a nutshell, holds that pure awareness and ordinary mental activity arise as an inseparable union - a notion that goes back to Saraha. Gampopa also took the four yoga- model from the source tradition, not without giving it his own bent.[67] This became the standard presentation of mahāmudrā until the present day.

1.2.2. Principal Works of the Tibetan Schools

The translations of Indian Mahāmudrā literature were preserved in the Tibetan canons and served as a basis for the composition of reference texts, which important scholars in each school composed throughout the centuries. Among the most important translations of Indian masters are the *Three Cycles of Dohās*[68] by Saraha; the *Seven Accomplishments;*[69] the *Eight Treasures of Small Dohās*[70] by various authors; the *Six Collections of Essence;*[71] the *Mahāmudrā Upadeśa*[72] by Tilopa; the *Dṛṣṭiksamkṣipta*[73] by Nāropa; the *Condensed Mahāmudrā*;[74] *Amanasikaroddeśa* by Maitrīpa;[75] or the collection *Treatises of Mahāmudrā from India*.[76]

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[67] Daniel Brown, *Pointing Out*, 22. The four yogas of the source tradition will be discussed as the four symbols of mahāmudrā in Chapter Two.
[68] *do ha skor gsum*
[69] *grub pa sde bdun*. This text is listed by Pema Karpo in his *Explanation on the Mahāmudrā Upadeśa.* For more explanations, see Wangchuk Dorje, *Mahāmudrā , Ocean*, xxix.
[70] *do chung mdzod rgyad*
[71] *snying pa skor drug*
[72] *phyag gya chen po'i man ngag*, also known as the Ganges Mahāmudrā, *phyag chen gang ga ma*
[73] Skt. for: Summary of the View, Tib.*lta ba mdor bsdus*
[74] *phyag chen tshig bsdus*
[75] This choice of texts is taken from Ponlop Rinpoche's introduction to Wangchuk Dorje, *Mahāmudrā , Ozean*, xxviii - xxxi.
[76] *phyag chen rgya gzhung,* Collection by the seventh Karmapa Chödrak Gyatso, (acc. to *A Song for the King*,11. See catalogue of TBRC (www.tbrc.org) under "marpa kagyu."

The yogi-poet Milarepa continued the Indian tradition of poetic songs of realizations in Tibet and composed the *Hundred Thousand Songs of Milarepa*.[77] His poetic form of instruction popularized the mahāmudrā teachings and led to highly structured presentations of the mahāmudrā path in all schools.

Gampopa presented his innovative approach in several texts, in *The Ineffable Mahāmudrā Gradual Meditation*;[78] as well as the *Explanation of the Sole Path of Mahāmudrā*[79] and, to a certain extent, in his *Jewel Ornament of Liberation.*[80]

Gampopa's students started twelve transmission lineages of the Dhagpo Kagyü tradition, four main and eight lesser lineages, many of which have contributed major works to the mahāmudrā literature. Among the four major lineages, the Karma Kamtsang (*karma kam tshang*) lineage, founded by Düsum Khyenpa (*dus gsum khyen pa,* 1110-1193), is the only one that still exists. It considers the work of the ninth Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje (*dbang phyug rdo rje,* 1556-1603) as authoritative. He wrote three major meditation manuals: (1) *Mahāmudrā: The Ocean of Definite Meaning*;[81] (2) *Mahāmudrā: Illuminating the Darkness of Ignorance*;[82] (3) *Mahāmudrā: Pointing Out the Dharmakāya*.[83] The longest of these manuals, the *Ocean of Definite Meaning,* is mentioned in Jamgön Kongtrul's Retreat Manual[84] as the main mahāmudrā reference for the three-year meditation retreats. This text will be examined in more detail in Chapter Three as an example of the recension of Saraha's mahāmudrā in Tibet. The third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje

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[77] *mi la mgur 'bum,* short for: *rje btsun mi la ras pa'i rnam thar rgyas par phye ba mgur 'bum*. Translated by Garma C.C. Chang.

[78] *phyag rgya chen po bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i sgom rim,* in *Collected Works of Gampopa* (*gsung 'bum sgam po pa*).

[79] *rje sgam po pa'i phyag rgya chen po lam gcig chod*, in Jamgon Kongtrul (*'jam mgon kong sprul*), *gdams ngag mdzod,* 5:67-69.

[80] *dam chos yid bzhin nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan,* short: *dvags po thar rgyan*.

[81] *lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi zab khrid nges don rgya mtsho'i snying po phrin las 'od 'phro,* short *phyag chen nges don rgya mtsho.*

[82] In short: *phag chen ma rig mun sel*

[83] *phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi khrid zin bris bdud rtsi'i nying khu chos sku mdzub tshugs su ngo sprod pa*, short *phyag chen chos sku mdzub tshugs*

[84] '*jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas,*(1813-1899). Jamgon Kongtrul's Retreat Manual, trans. Ngawang Zangpo, 77-78.

(*rang byung rdo rje,* 1284-1339) also wrote influential mahāmudrā literature, for example *Mahāmudrā: Pointing Out the Three Kāyas*[85] and the very popular *Mahāmudrā Aspiration Prayer.*[86] Among the eight lesser lineages, which go back to Gampopa's student Pagmodrupa (*phag mo gru pa rdo rje rgyal po,* 1110-1170), two stand out for their contribution to the mahāmudrā literature. The Drugpa Kagyü (*'brug pa bka' rgyud*) lineage produced authoritative figures such as Tsangpa Gyare (*gtsang pa rgya ras,* 1161-1211), founder of the Drug monastery, who wrote *Eight Major and Minor Instructions*;[87] Künkyen Pema Karpo (*padma dkar po,*1527-1596), author of the *Explanation on the Mahāmudrā Upadeśa: The Treasury of the Victorious Ones*;[88] and Tashi Namgyal (*bkra shis rnam rgyal,* 1512-1687) who composed the extensive work *Moonbeams of Mahāmudrā*..[89] Tashi Namgyal's commentary contains numerous quotations of Saraha's work and will be examined as another example of mahāmudrā recension in Tibet in Chapter Three.

The second lineage inaugurated by Pagmodrupa and his disciple Jigten Sumgon (*'jig rten gsum mgon* 1143-1217), the Drigung Kagyü (*'bri kung bka' rgyud*) lineage, developed the Profound Five-Fold Path School[90] of mahāmudrā, consisting of the practices of an enlightened motivation, deity yoga, guru yoga, gradual meditation practice, and proper dedication. A major composition of this school is Künga Rinchen's (*kun dga' rin chen*) *Clarifying the Jewel Rosary of the profound Fivefold Path*,[91] written in 1523.

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[85] *sku gsum ngo sprod.* See Ponlop Rinpoche, Introduction, *Mahāmudrā,* xxx
[86] *nges don phyag rgya chen po'i smon lam*
[87] *khrid chen brgyad dang khrid chung rgyad*
[88] *phag chen rgyal ba'i gan mdzod*
[89] *phyag chen zla wa'i 'od zer,* trans by Lobsang Lhalungpa as *Mahāmudrā, The Quintessence of Mind and Mahāmudrā.*
[90] *phyag gya chen po lnga ldan*
[91] *phyag chen lnga ldan nor bu'i phreng ba'i gsal byed* ,translated by Khechen Konchog Gyaltsen as *Garland Of Mahāmudrā Practices*

The Gelug School integrated elements of the Kagyü mahāmudrā within its own system, and called it Gelug-Kagyü mahāmudrā. The fourth Panchen Lama, Lobzang Chökyi Gyaltsen (*blo bzang chos kyi rgyal mtshan,* 1570-1662), composed *A Root Text for the Gelug-Kagyü Tradition of Mahāmudrā*,[92] in which he used Kagyü methods for recognizing the conventional nature of mind, including the most subtle level of clear-light mind and its manifestation as thought and appearance; and Gelug methods for realizing emptiness as being mind's absolute nature.[93]

Both, the Kagyü and Gelug School practice sūtra- and tantra-mahāmudrā. In contrast, the Sakya school considers mahāmudrā exclusively as part of the *anuttarayoga* tantra, and it is therefore kept as secret as any tantric practice. The school's authoritative work is *Root Verses on Mahāmudrā with Seven Branches*[94] by Sakya Pandita (*sa skya paNDi ta kun dga' rgyal mtshan,* 1181-1251).[95]

1.2.3. Mahāmudrā Systems

Systematizing mahāmudrā has lead to a number of very useful models. There are three models which describe mahāmudrā in terms of (1) its basic philosophical view, (2) its methods and (3) its progressive results. Whereas this introduction can offer no more than a generalization, omitting much of the subtleties of each term, it is however necessary to give an overview of these three systems. The explanations are based on sources of the Kagyü tradition as the most prominent representative of mahāmudrā in the field of Tibetan Buddhism.

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[92] *dge ldan bka' brgyud rin poche'i phyag chen rtsa ba rgya -ba'i gzhung lam,* short*: phyag chen rtsa ba*

[93] More on Gelug approach to Mahāmudrā : Brown, *Pointing Out,* 26; Dalai Lama and Berzin: *The Gelug/Kagyu Tradition of Mahāmudrā.*

[94] *Root Verses on Mahāmudrā with Seven Branches, phyag gya chen po yen lag bdun ldan gyi rtsa ba*

[95] According to Lhalungpa in Namgyal,*Mahāmudrā,* xxxviii, the main Sakya work on Mahāmudrā is *The Eye-Opening Tools of Mahāmudrā.*

The basic philosophical view. The system of ground-, path-, and fruition mahāmudrā[96] describes mahāmudrā in terms of the philosophical view that supports the meditation, its result, and the methods that are employed to bring about that result. Ground mahāmudrā is equated with buddha-nature or coemergent wisdom,[97] which pervades the mind stream of all beings, whether they are enlightened or not. This potential is developed throughout the path mahāmudrā. Once a person has fully actualized buddha-nature, we talk about fruition mahāmudrā or enlightenment. This state is described as an intuitive understanding of non-duality and emptiness, endowed with dynamic qualities. It is crucial to understand that this state is not a new dimension, but the uncovering of an original one. The path mahāmudrā is therefore designed as a purification of adventitious mental obscurations, which allows the recognition of the view of the ground mahāmudrā. This understanding is consequently stabilized until it is totally independent of outer conditions.

Methods. The system of sūtra mahāmudrā, mantra mahāmudrā[98] and essence mahāmudrā distinguishes three types of methods the adept uses to attain final realization. Sūtra mahāmudrā relies on methods described in the sūtras and śāstra's; mantra mahāmudrā on those described in the tantras.[99] Essence mahāmudrā consists of a mixture of both types of methods with an emphasis on devotion as an expedient means.

As mentioned previously, the sūtra mahāmudrā path[100] was defined as such by the 12th century lineage holder Gampopa. Sūtra mahāmudrā claims to originate with Buddha Śākyamuni's hidden instructions in sūtras such as the *Samādhirājasūtra, Sāgaramatiparipṛccha, Maitreyaprasthāna, Gaganaganjaparipṛccha,* and others. Maitrīpa compiled these in his work *Amanasikāroddeśa,*

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[96] Wangchug Dorje, *Mahāmudrā, Ocean*, 225 ff.
[97] Ibid. The term connate is used by the translator.
[98] Mantra mahāmudrā is also called tantra mahāmudrā.
[99] Tantra or mantra teachings, according to Ponlop Rinpoche in Wangchuk Dorje, *Mahāmudrā*, xxiv.
[100] Explanations according to Ponlop Rinpoche, Ibid., xxv.

which, together with Maitreya's *Uttaratantraśāstra* and the Kadampa (*bka' gdams pa*) teachings of Atiśa (982-1054), were used by Gampopa as the textual and philosophical foundations of the sūtra mahāmudrā system.

In this system, adepts train in three aspects: (1) the preliminary practices (*ngon'dro*) which prepare them psychologically and physically for formal meditation, (2) concentration or calm-abiding techniques (*zhi gnas*), and (3) superior insight meditation (*lhag mthong*) to realize the "non-conceptual wisdom beyond all elaborations,"[101] also called the experience of the *dharmadhātu*. This path integrates the teaching corpus concerned with the ethical conduct of the *pāramitāyāna*. Trainees follow this path without prior introduction to vajrayāna practices. They are, however, required to engage in a close dialogue with a meditation master.

Mantra mahāmudrā is derived from the "highest yoga tantras" (*anuttarayogatantra*), such as the *Guhyasamāja, Mahāmayā, Kālacakra, Hevajra,* and the *Cakrasamvara Tantra.* The practitioner has to perform very elaborate rituals, which entail the preparation of a maṇḍala, with huge amounts of material offerings as well as recitations of prayers and liturgy. The meditation itself consists of two stages. The generation stage (*utpattikrama, skyes rim*) is a phase of formal practice including mantra recitation, complex visualizations and techniques to master the currents of subtle energy in the body. The completion stage (*saṃpannakrama, rdzogs rim*) is formless practice, where the techniques of the generation phase are released to give way to the resultant very subtle clear light mind with which ultimate reality is realized. The techniques involving subtle energy currents lead to results that mahāmudrā masters such as Saraha, Tilopa, Virūpa, Kāṇha and others describe in terms of a play of blissful ecstasy and awareness. Mantra mahāmudrā is practiced - after the initiation to the naked, natural state of reality by the third and

[101] Ponlop Rinpoche in Wangchuk Dorje, *Mahāmudrā, Ozean,* xxv.

fourth *abhiṣeka* - by following the instructions of the generation and completion stage. Nāropa's "six dharmas" (*nāro chos drug*) have a special role in this practice.

The highest yoga (*anuttarayoga*) tradition is transmitted through the four empowerments (*abhiṣeka, dbang*),[102] namely the (1) vase -, (2) secret-, (3) wisdom-awareness-, and (4) fourth-, or word-, empowerment. The term *abhiṣeka* has the twofold meaning of purifying and empowering, according to Jamgön Kongtrul.[103] First, the storehouse consciousness (*ālaya vijñāna*) is cleansed of obscuring, habitual tendencies "to a state of purity,"[104] which is an indispensable step towards enlightenment. Secondly, through *abhiṣeka,* the guru confers authority to his or her disciples. Each of the four empowerments authorizes the disciple to train a particular aspect of Buddhist tantric practice. The vase empowerment enables the adept to practice the generation stage (*bskyed rim*) of a deity (*yi dam)* practice and realize the union of emptiness and appearances (*snang stong*). The secret empowerment is said to create conditions for the students to develop faith and wisdom. It derives its name from the fact that the empowerment is conferred by means of secret substances.[105] It authorizes the practice of developing inner heat (*gtum mo*), relying on practices with subtle energy (*prāṇa*, *rlung*), which is said to lead to the realization of bliss and emptiness (*bde stong*). The wisdom-awareness empowerment introduces the practice of uniting with a consort, either with an actual physical person or with a visualized awareness consort (*rig ma*). This practice enables the experience of the four joys[106] and the realization of emptiness and awareness (*rig stong*). This practice is also

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[102] See Kongtrul, *Treasury of Knowledge, Systems of Buddhist Tantra,* 205-237. The term abhiseka is derived from the Sanskrit term *abhishimcha* meaning to cast or to sprinkle, whereas the Tibetan term *dbang* means literally power- thus the two terms common in English: initiation and empowerment.
[103] Ibid.*,* 205.
[104] Ibid., 205.
[105] For further explanations see Kongtrul, *Buddhist Tantra,* 230- 231.
[106] The four joys: 1. joy, *ānanda, dga' ba*. 2. supreme joy, *paramānanda, mchog dga*'. 3. special joy*, viramānanda, khyad dga',* 4. connate joy, *sahajānanda, lhan kyes kyi dga' ba*. More information in Guenther, *Ecstatic Spontaneity,* 188, n126.

called the meditation of non duality (*snyom 'jug*) of wisdom and skillful means.[107] The last empowerment is simply called "fourth", or "word-empowerment," because the guru uses words to point out "actual pristine awareness."[108] The objective of the four empowerments is to establish the potential for the four dimensions (or literally, bodies) of enlightenment, namely the body of emanation (*nirmanakāya, sprul sku*); body of enjoyment (*sambhogakāya, longs spyod kyi sku*); dharma-body (*dharmakāya, chos sku*); and essence body (*svabhāvikakāya, de bzhin nyid kyi sku*). These four dimensions explain enlightenment in terms of an ineffable ultimate aspect (dharma-body), which expresses itself in a subtle and gross material dimension (body of enjoyment and body of emanation respectively). The inseparability of these three aspects is called "essence body."

Within this tradition, mantra mahāmudrā is related to the third and fourth empowerments. In the wisdom-awareness empowerment, the adept experiences stages of increasingly subtle spiritual attainments, referred to as the four joys, or, in a generalized term, as great bliss (*mahāsukha*). These four joys are characterized by a decrease of dualistic cognition and an increase in non-dualistic timeless awareness that lead to the realization of ultimate reality.[109] The third empowerment uses imagery of sexual content, which indicates that sexual practice was indeed an actual part of the tantric path, before it was "monastisized" by reformers such as Gampopa. Today only symbolic traces of sexual practice are left.

In one of the Saraha-tales,[110] Saraha himself experiences spontaneously the four joys after drinking four cups of beer offered to him by four brahmin girls. These girls are sometimes seen as disguised celestial messengers (*mkha' 'gro ma*), or as a symbolic description for an

[107] See Brown, *Pointing Out the Great Way*, 127.
[108] Kongtrul, *Buddhist Tantras*, 232.
[109] Herbert Guenther in *Ecstatic Spontaneity*, 163: "The four joys are phases of intensity that mark the lessening of dichotomic cognition (rnam rtog) and the strenghening of unitive pristine awareness (ye shes). ...intricate play between joy and awareness, sexual overtones...."
[110] According to Karma Trinlaypa, in Guenther, *Ecstatic Spontaneity,* 4.

emptiness-experience. In any case, Saraha’s encounter with them sets him on his path to spiritual perfection with the help of a consort.[111]

The fourth empowerment has to put the experience of bliss, pristine awareness and emptiness into the context of mahāmudrā. The guru conferring the empowerments invites the students to take their experience during the third empowerment as the basis for understanding the pointing-out instructions of the fourth empowerment. With the help of these, the adepts should obtain a direct glimpse of mahāmudrā. This experience has to be stabilized later on during the practice of the completion stage. Mahāmudrā, the guru explains to the students, possesses seven aspects,[112] namely "total enjoyment (*longs spyod rdzogs*); union (*kha sbyor*); great bliss (*bde ba chen po*); devoid of intrinsic nature (*rang bzhin med pa*); filled with compassion (*snying rje nges gang*); an unending stream (*rgyun mi ‘chad pa*); and an unobstructed presence (’gog pa med pa)."[113]

Empowerments are an indispensable requisite for the practice of mantra mahāmudrā. Failure to comply with this rule "will bring the performers no result,"[114] or, even more drastically, "will lead to hell, not to freedom."[115]

Essence mahāmudrā is distinguished from the two previous paths by its claim to sudden realization of the true nature of mind, called *tha mal gyi shes pa*, translated as "the ordinary mind." Adepts do not follow a progressive path in the style of the sūtra mahāmudrā, nor the extensive practices of mantra mahāmudrā, but they develop devotion for their spiritual mentor, who has to be a highly accomplished practitioner and lineage holder. Through a mind to mind transmission, the student is believed to gain sudden insight of *tha mal gyi shes pa.*

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[111] Ibid.
[112] *yan lag bdun ldan gyi phyag rgya chen po*
[113] Kongtrul, *Tantric Systems,* 474, n 68.
[114] Kalacakra Root Tantra, cited by Kongtrul, ibid., 208.
[115] Ibid., 207.

Essence mahāmudrā is said to resemble the *dzogchen* path of the Nyingma School. Textual sources are those of the two other paths, but essence mahāmudrā finds its main expression in poetical texts of realization, such as the *dohās*, *gītis* and *upadeśa* treatises of Indian or Tibetan eccentric masters (*mahāsiddhas*), of which Saraha was a highly prolific one. His songs give a certain impression of the erratic teaching style of essence mahāmudrā, and will be discussed in Chapter Two.

This classification of three types of mahāmudrā was explained by Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye in the fourth section of the eighth chapter of his Treasury of Knowledge, volume 3, pp. 375-394 of the Peking edition.

The progressive results .The system of the four yogas of mahāmudrā[116] describes the gradual progression along the path mahāmudrā; it is designed for the majority of practitioners who do not have the capacity for sudden realization. The model was codified by Gampopa, and consequently elaborated by several scholars into a twelve step model, which basically subdivides each yoga into a lower, intermediate, and superior level.[117] The four yogas are called (1) one-pointedness (*rtse gcig*), (2) freedom from elaborations (*spros bral*), (3) one taste (*ro gcig*), and (4) non-meditation (*sgom med*).

The first level, one-pointedness, is acquired mainly through concentration, or calm-abiding (*zhi gnas*) methods, leading to the experiences of bliss, clarity and non-discursiveness. The meditator "rests one-pointedly [in the essence of mind] and an experience of clear vibrant, crisp awareness (*rig pa gsal sing nge ba ye re ba*) arises."[118]

The second yoga is characterized by the realization of emptiness, which signifies a qualitative shift in the development of the meditation. In this stage, the meditator does not rely

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[116] *Ocean*, 211 ff, *Ozean*, 51ff, and *Moonbeam Mahāmudrā,* 350 ff.
[117] See discussion by Tashi Namgyal in *Moonbeam Mahāmudrā*, 373.
[118] Wangchuk Dorje, *Mahāmudrā, Ocean*, 212.

any longer upon effort to maintain mindfulness (*dran 'dzin gyi rtsol ba*),[119] and an understanding arises that the essence of mind and thoughts arise together as coemergent wisdom. "All experiences become empty, without [leaving] a trace," explains Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje in his manual *Mahāmudrā, The Ocean of Definitive Meaning.* The practitioner enjoys a feeling of freedom (*rang dbang*), as the natural mind, or the essence of mind, is "realized to be free from elaborations, like a seed removed from its husk."[120] The husk symbolizes the ordinary conceptual, dualistic activity in the mind, and is also called "elaborations." The meditator, who sees these elaborations as empty, becomes free from them, hence the name for this stage in the mahāmudrā progression.

In the level of one taste, the realization of emptiness is stabilized and the practitioner recognizes seemingly opposite experiences -- such as pleasant and unpleasant -- as having an inherently equal quality. The meditator ceases to distinguish between appearances and emptiness, between the relative and the ultimate, between saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, between happiness and suffering. He or she is able to see multiple phenomena as the expression of coemergent wisdom. The meditator started to have such an understanding on the level of the second yoga, but now it becomes a genuine attitude and "not merely an intellectual assessment."[121] The capacity to see the equal taste of multiple experiences gives this level its name, one taste. However, the practitioner is said to have some difficulty maintaining the one-taste-realization beyond the context of formal meditation, and a subtle sense of "an apprehended object and an apprehending subject"[122] continues to obscure the mind.

The final level, called non-meditation, refers to the highest stage of mahāmudrā, in which the practitioner does not rely any longer on conditions (i.e. meditation techniques) to attain and

[119] Ibid., 215.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid., 220.
[122] Ibid.

maintain realization. There is only "perfect mindfulness which is simply non-distraction."[123] The most subtle dualistic clinging is purified and the person lives in self-existing perfection (*lhun grub kyi rang sa*).[124] "Whatever one does is blissful," explains Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje,[125] and the actions of such a person are perceived as "benefiting beings,"[126] even though at times other people might think that "one's conduct is like a child's."[127] This level is called enlightenment, or mahāmudrā. "One has attained the path of completion (*mthar phyin pa'i lam*)."[128]

Saraha's poetry suggests that he spoke and acted from this level.

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[123] Ibid., 223.
[124] *Ozean*, 68.
[125] Ibid., 224.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid., 226.

Chapter Two

2. Saraha's Works

The enigma of Saraha's life continues - as is to be expected - in his work. There is no historical evidence for his authorship of any of the texts attributed to him; no manuscript bears his signature. The oldest manuscripts were perhaps compiled centuries after his death, and likely compiled in a random manner that represented more the intentions (or the memory) of the scribe than that of the original author.[129] In the Tibetan hagiographies he is venerated as a singing poet, probably chanting more than reciting his spontaneous songs of realization; he does not appear as a writer. The question of authenticity of Saraha's texts has been discussed in detail by Kurtis Schaeffer.[130] The lack of historical and scriptural evidence leaves us with no definite answer.

We are stuck with the texts – texts that, nevertheless, have been venerated as Saraha's word by Buddhist practitioners and scholars for many centuries. Today, we have works attributed to Saraha in three different languages: Old Bengali, Western Apabhraṃśa, and Tibetan. The former two are both vernaculars of India; though it is not even quite certain that these were the original languages. Some scholars suspect that Saraha, being of Brahmin upbringing, might have sung his poems in Sanskrit.[131] The sheer variety of Tibetan translations, which indicate the decentralized manner in which Indian Buddhism came to Tibet during the second wave of translation, contribute further to a complex picture. Translations of the *Treasury of Dohās* into Tibetan, for example, exist in manifold versions and often do not represent any of the extant texts in the Indic language The proliferation of translations was curtailed in the 14th century when Tibetans finally canonized one version in the Tengyur (*bsTan 'gyur*).

129 Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin* 79.
130 Ibid., especially chapters 5 -7, pp 71-119.
131 Nijenhuis, *Indian Music: History and Structure,* 80 ff.

The most important source of Saraha’s work is the collection of twenty-six texts attributed to Saraha in the Derge Tengyur (*sde dge bstan ‘gyur*).[132] Additional texts or variations of texts can be found in other editions of the Tengyur, for example the Peking Tengyur, and, embedded in commentarial works, in canonical and extracanonical works. Four songs of Saraha were found in the *Caryāpāda*, written in Old Bengali. And a few songs exist in Apabhramśa. The following chapter will give an overview of Saraha’s literature.

2.1. The Derge Tengyur

In the Tantra (*rgyud*) Section of the Derge Tengyur are twenty six texts that bear Saraha’s name. They are found in six different sections, catalogued with the Tibetan letters *ra, wi, zhi, zi, phu,* and *mu,* and comprise 123.5 folios in total. Saraha has produced commentarial and liturgical works, and of course the songs for which he is mostly renowned.

The *ra* chapter of the tantra section contains commentarial and liturgical works concerning the *Buddhakapāla Tantra*:

1. དཔལ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཐོད་པའི་རྒྱུད་ཀྱི་དཀའ་འགྲེལ་ཡེ་ཤེས་ལྡན་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།

dpal sangs rgyas thod pa'i rgyud kyi dka' 'grel ye shes ldan pa zhes bya ba/

śrī buddhakapālatantrapañjikā jñāna vatī nāma

(ra 104b1-150a2, D 1652, P 2524.)[133]

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[132] Works of the Derge canon will be cited according to the catalog number in Hajuku Ui (*A Complete Catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist Canons*), abbreviated D.

[133] P xxxx indicates the location of the same text in the Peking Tengyur, D xxxx in the Delhi Tengyur..

The *Śri-buddhakapālatantrapañjikii Jñānavatī*[134] is a commentary on difficult points of the tantra, as the title reveals. The text explains the constellation of the maṇḍala of Buddha Śākyamuni, and the transformation that takes place at the moment of his entering into nirvāṇa. The teacher is in the center of the maṇḍala, surrounded by his entourage, comprising Ānanda, foremost of the assembly of the arhats, and Avalokiteśvara, representing the bodhisattva sangha. At the moment of the Buddha's passage into nirvāṇa, Saraha explains a transformation from ordinary perception to pure vision, or sacred outlook. (*dag snang*). The members of the maṇḍala become part of the Buddha's bodymaṇḍala - his hearing, his seeing, his subtle energy channels (*nāḍi, rtsa*), his perfection of meditation (*saṃpannakrama, rdzog rim*), etc. They are described as simultaneously internal aspects and external agents of the maṇḍala of enlightenment. Saraha explains *parinirvāṇa* to be the manifestation of dharmakāya, which is beyond thought. It can be seen and understood but not conceptually grasped.

2. དཔལ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཐོད་པའི་སྒྲུབ་ཐབས་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།

dpal sangs rgyas thod pa'i sgrub thabs zhes bya ba/

śrī buddhakapālasādhana nāma

(ra 225b3-229b3, D 1655, P 2527.)

The second work in this section is a *sādhana* ritual manual belonging to the *Buddhakapālatantra.*

3. འབྱུང་པོ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་གཏོར་མའི་ཆོ་ག

[134] Information from Davidson, *Indian Esoteric Buddhism*, 250 ff.

'byung po thams cad kyi gtor ma'i cho ga

sarvabhūtabalividhi

(ra 229b3-230b2, D 1656, P 2528.)

This short work is a ritual liturgy for the offering of torma (*gtor ma, bali,* a sacral offering of edible substance).

4. དཔལ་སངས་རྒྱས་ཐོད་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་དཀྱིལ་འཁོར་གྱི་ཆོ་གའི་རིམ་པ་གསལ་བ།

dpal sangs rgyas thod pa zhes bya ba'i dkyil 'khor gyi cho ga'i rim pa gsal ba/

śrī buddhakapālamaṇḍalavidhikrama pradyotana nāma

(ra 230b2-243b5, D 1657, P 2529.)

The last text in this section is a longer manual that explains the maṇḍala ritual associated with the *Buddhakapāla tantra*. All four texts of this section were translated into Tibetan by Gayadhara (*gyi jo zla ba'i 'od zer*, tenth/eleventh century).

The second group of texts consists of the poetic songs, generally known as the *dohā*s. The *dohā*s belong to a section called "Commentaries on the General Intention of the Highest Yoga Tantras,"[135] which has 287 works altogether, according to Zhuchen Tsultrim Rinchen (*zhu chen tshul khrims rin chen*), author of the catalog to the Derge Tengyur. There are eighteen songs, spread over the chapters *wi, zhi,* and *zi* of the canon. All *dohā*s together only amount to 43 folios; however, seven different translators have been involved in their transmission to Tibet, as can be concluded from reading the colophons.

[135] For more information, see Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 215.

*Dohā*s are enigmatic spiritual songs, "pithy couplets,"[136] in two-line stanzas. An additional meaning is provided by the commentator on the *Treasury of Dohās*, Chomden Raldri (*bcom ldan rig pa'i ral gri*, 1227-1305).[137] According to his explanations, *dohā* means "plentiful" and "uncontrived," which refers to the fact that *dohā*s teach the uncontrived mind, free from concepts and emotions. An alternative meaning of *dohā* is "milking which deeply fills,"[138] which is a poetic way of talking about developing the potential of the human mind by milking the mind which is filled with primordial awareness.

Among the eighteen *dohā*s, two trilogies stand out because of their popularity, their length and the depth of spiritual message: the *Trilogy of the Treasury of Songs*, and the *Trilogy of Adamantine Songs*. The former is categorized as caryā gīti (*spyod pa'i glu*), the latter as vajra gīti (*rdo rje glu*). Caryā gītis, literally "performance songs," were to be sung to a certain melody, and often the *rāgā* (mood) was specified at the beginning of the text.[139] The preferred setting for such a performance was a *gaṇacakra,* a gathering of a sacral feast offering. However, as we read in the hagiographies mentioning the *Dohā* Treasury Trilogy, Saraha sang these verses spontaneously to enlighten his audience: the King, the queen and the entire population of the kingdom.[140]

Vajra gītis are not characterized by a specific meter or musical mood, but by their content. As the word vajra - adamantine, indestructible - indicates, they treat the indestructible nature of reality, which is *śūnyatā,* emptiness.

The *Trilogy of the Treasury of Songs* consists of (1) the *Dohākośagīti* - *People Dohā*, (2) the *Dohākośa-upadeśagīti* - *King Dohā*, and (3), the *Dohākośanāmacāryagīti* - *Queen Dohā*.

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[136] Braitstein, *Saraha's Adamantine Songs*, 145.
[137] Chomden Raldri in Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 130-131.
[138] Ibid., 83.
[139] Braitstein, *Saraha's Adamantine Songs* 147. Nijenhuis, *Indian Music: History and Structure*, 83.
[140] Karma Trinlaypa, translated by Guenther in *Ecstatic Spontaneity,* 6-7.

Curiously they do not appear as an entity in the canon, the first one being in the *wi* section and the latter two in the *zhi* section. And indeed, Tibetans have debated over the authenticity of the latter two works.[141] The history of how the trilogy, or better one version of it, made it into the canon in the 14th century is long and complex. It was transmitted from India to Tibet "no less than seventeen times"[142] during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Besides the trilogy of the Derge Tengyur, the *dohā*s are also found in total or in part in the Peking Tengyur. A number of versions are embedded in commentaries, including:

- *Commentary on Difficult Points,*[143] by Advayavajra (*gnyis med rdo rje,* 1007-1085).This is the oldest fragment known today of a version of Saraha's *Dohākosagīti;* it is written in Apabhraṃśa, and dated 1101.
- *Extensive Commentary on the meaning of the Treasury of Dohā Verses,*[144] by Advayavajra.
- *The Illumination of Suchness: An Introduction to the Dohās*[145] by Ling Repa (*gling chen ras pa padma rdo rje,* 1128-1188).
- *Commentary on Songs of the Heart's Concern*[146] by Advaya Avadhūti (*gnis med Avadhūiti,* of unknown date, according to Guenther[147]) The"heart's concern" or "heart meaning"(*sārārtha, snying po'i don*) became the name for Saraha's teaching as a whole.
- *Ornamental Flower for the Dohās*[148] by Chomden Raldri (*bcom ldan ral gri,* 1227-1305).

[141] Schaeffer has documented the debate extensively. *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 71-80. See also Guenther, *Ecstatic Spoantaneity,* 10-11.
[142] Schaeffer, 59.
[143] *do hā mdzod gyi dka' 'grel,* D 2256, P3101.
[144] The full name of the text: *Extensive Commentary on the Totally Arcane Song of the Inexhaustible Treasury which Elucidates the Natural Realit*y (*mi dzad pa'i gter mdzod yongs su gang ba'i glu zhes bya ba gnyug ma'i de ny rab tu ston pa'i rgya cher bshad pa*. D2247, P3102.
[145] *dho hā'i yig sna de nyid gsal ba.* In *The Collected Works* (*bka' 'bum*) *of Gling chen ras pa Padma Rdo rje.*
[146] *do ha mdzod kyi snying po don gyi glu 'grel pa*. D 2268, P3120.
[147] Guenther, *Ecstatic Spontaneity*, 8.
[148] *do ha rgyan gyi me tog.* CPN (Cultural Palace of Nationalities) 007316(4).37 folios

- *Treasury of Oral Instructions*[149] by Jamgon Kongtrul (*'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas,* 1813-1899).[150]

Karma Trinlaypa (*karma 'phrin las pa*, 1456-1539) was most interested in the history of the transmission of the *dohā*s. Much important information on the transmission of the *dohā*s stems from Karma Trinlaypa's *Commentary on the Dohā Trilogy.*[151]

5. དོ་ཧ་མཛོད་ཀྱི་གླུ།

do ha mdzod kyi glu/

dohākoṣagīti

(wi 70b5-77a3, D 2224, P 3068.)

The *Dohākosa-gīti,* literally, "Song of the *Dohā* Treasury," but generally known as the *People's Dohā* is, at 145 verses, and the longest of the three songs. It combines pointing out instructions as to the empty nature of all things; meditation instructions (or rather non-meditation instructions); mockery of any kind of formal practice; metaphorical expressions of yogic experience; and continual references to the innate nature - *sahaja*.

English translators have worked on various versions of the *Dohākośagīti*:

- Roger Jackson in *Tantric Treasures*

[149] *A Treasury of Instructions and Techniques for Spiritual Realization, gdams ngag mdzod.*
[150] *gdam ngag mdzod* of *'jam mgon kong sprul*, and in collections by *mi pham rgya mtsho*, and *lha'i btsun pa rin chen rnam rgyal.* See Schaeffer, 211.
[151] *do ha skor gsum ti ka 'bring po sems kyi rnam thar ston pa'i me long.*

- Kurtis Schaeffer, imbedded in the commentary *Ornamental Flower for the Dohās,* in *Dreaming the Great Brahmin*, 129 - 173.
- David Snellgrove, published in *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages* edited by Conze, Horner, Snellgrove, Waley. The first translation into a Western language, however, was into French by Shahidullah in 1928.

In this song, Saraha promotes his particular style of minimal intervention-meditation. He starts with a series of virulent critiques against all religious practices, Buddhist and non-Buddhist, who fail to bring about ultimate reality. The song opens with condescension and provocation against those who glorify and calcify their particular style of spiritual convention: (verses1-2)[152]

> Bah! Brahmins - they don't know what's what
> in vain they incant their four Vedas.
> They incant holding earth and water and kusha-grass
> And sit at home making offerings to the fire.
> Their oblations are pointless; the acrid smoke just stings their eyes.

Saraha focuses in this song on pointing out erroneous meditation techniques, the crucial role of the guru on the spiritual path, and the importance of discovering the dimension of oneness and motionlessness in the mind as the only valid path to enlightenment. The style is characterized by simple direct language and provocative imagery, as the following verses (57-58) beautifully exemplifies:

> Abandon mind and nonmind, too, and be just like a child;
> be firmly devout in the guru's word, and the innate wave will rise.
> Without syllable or color, or qualities beyond,
> it can't be spoken or known - thus I declare.
> How can the utmost power be described?
> Like a virgin's first taste of rapture.[153]

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[152] Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 53.
[153] Ibid., 87.

The song includes also a number of verses which use imagery that is beyond the grasp of the non-initiated. Metaphors such as the "mistress eat[ing] her husband,"[154] "lotus and vajra,"[155] "Yamuma and Ganges sea,"[156] refer to tantric practices and require the oral instructions of a teacher - the indispensable guru - to be properly understood and put into practice.

6. དོ་ཧ་མཛོད་ཅེས་བྱ་བ་སྤྱོད་པའི་གླུ།

do ha mdzod ces bya ba spyod pa'i glu

dohākoṣa nāma caryāgīti

(zhi 26b6-28b6, D2236, P 3110.)

The *Dohākosa namā caryāgīti* or *King Dohā* (literally "Performance Verses of the Treasury of Songs") is found in the *zhi* chapter of the tantra section; it is one of twelve songs. It is the shortest of the trilogy with forty stanzas. According to the legend, it is addressed to the king Mahāpāla, who came to reprimand Saraha for his unorthodox behavior and was converted by Saraha's magical powers (in one version of the story) or by the power of the instructions Saraha gives in this song. The latter version indicates the function of the song as an initiation or "pointing out" instruction into the nature of mind. Saraha uses the popular simile of water and waves to instruct the king to realize the single taste of manifold experiences. "Saraha never passed beyond the oneness of his being,"[157] although the king projected the idea of brahmin, scholar, Buddhist, law-breaker, etc. on him.

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154 Verse 84, Ibid.,101.
155 Verse 94, Ibid.,107.
156 Verse 47, Ibid., 80.
157 Guenther, *Royal Song,* 91.

As calm water lashed by wind
Turns into waves and rollers,
So the king thinks of Saraha
In many ways, although one man.[158]

According to the story, King Mahāpāla attains spontaneously realization upon hearing Saraha's song.[159]

This song differs in some respect to the *People's Dohā*. It is shorter; more restrained in its critique of other spiritual groups; and uses a sheer abundance of metaphors. The opening verses are words of homage - instead of the irreverent "Bah, Brahmins" of the *People's Dohā*.[160]

I bow down to noble Manjuśri
I bow down to Him who has conquered the finite.[161]

Saraha uses rather conventional mahāmudrā-metaphors in this *dohā*, such as water and waves; light and dark; cloud and rain; salt in water; reflection in a mirror, with which he attempts to illustrate his understanding of ultimate reality. In this poem, the conventional confusion is expressed in the terms of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, whereas the ultimate understanding is expressed through the *via negativa* as no-mind, non-memory.[162]

Four English and one French translations are published so far:

- Herbert Guenther: *The Royal Song of Saraha*
- Herbert Guenther: *Ecstatic Spontaneity*: *Saraha's Three Cycles of Dohā.*
- Khenchen Thrangu: *A Song for the King*
- David Snellgrove, published in *Buddhist Texts Through the Ages* edited by Conze, et al.

[158] Translation by Guenther, *Royal Song,* 63.
[159] Karma Trinlaypa, *do hā*, 4.2-8. In Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 22.
[160] Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 53.
[161] Translation by Guenther, *Royal Song,* 63.
[162] See verses 29-30, Ibid., 69.

- M. Shahidullah, *Les Chants Mystiques de Kanha et de Saraha*

7. མི་ཟད་པའི་གཏེར་མཛོད་མན་ངག་གི་གླུ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།

mi zad pa'i gter mdzod man ngag gi glu zhes bya ba

dohākoṣopadeśagīti nāma

(zhi 28b6-33b4, D 2264, P 3111.)

The *Dohākosa Upadeśagīti* or *Queen Dohā* is a song of eighty verses on mahāmudrā, as it announces in the introduction. Literally, the song's title can be rendered as "Song of Oral Instructions of the Inexhaustible Treasury." The midsection of this song treats a topic unheard of in the two previous *dohā*s. Saraha goes into some length to describe the conduct of an eccentric yogi including instructions on how to find a suitable spiritual consort and how to act with her.[163]

> Through [authentic] empowerments, [the yogi] will bring his
> consort/*anima*-figure to [spiritual] maturity whose three indications are
> Trust, steadfastness, and paucity of divisive notions.[164]

Herbert Guenther translates and explains this song in *Ecstatic Spontaneity*: *Saraha's Three Cycles of Dohā.* The translation into Tibetan of this *dohā* was accomplished by Vajrapāṇi (b. 1017) and Balpo Asu.

If we proceed in the catalogue order of the Derge Tengyur, we find two alphabetical *dohā*s, in which the author uses the Apabhraṃśa alphabet as a structure for his poems.[165]

8. ཀ་ཁའི་དོ་ཧ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།

[163] Verses 39-46, Guenther, *Ecstatic Spontaneity,* 135-138.
[164] Ibid., 137.
[165] They are a part of a trilogy or even a quartet, according to Schaeffer, *Dreaming,* 83. I have not found the missing one or two *dohā*s however.

ka kha'i do ha zhes bya ba/

kakhasyadohā nāma

(zhi 55b3-57b2, D 2266, P 3113.)

The "Alphabetical *Dohā*" as well as its commentary (below) were translated by Śrīvairocanavajra.

9. ཀ།ཁའི་དོ་ཧའི་བཤད་པ་བྲིས་པ།

ka kha'i do ha'i bshad pa bris pa/

kakha dohāṭippaṇa

(zhi 57b2-65b7, D 2267, P3114.)

"Explanatory Commentary to the Alphabetical *Dohā*"

These are followed by the second trilogy, the adamantine, or vajra songs (*rdo rje glu*). The name for this class of texts is derived from its content, rather than its form. Their outer form or meter does not distinguish vajra songs from other forms of verse.[166] The term vajra *(rdo rje*) indicates that the content of the poems deals with the qualities of mind from a tantric perspective, where mind is equated to a diamond, which is "pure, impossible to stain or alter, clear, unbreakable and precious."[167] A similar description reads the symbolism of vajra as "indestructible, never divisible, never holding to the phenomena of duality,"[168] thereby relating it to *śūnyatā,* or emptiness. "Emptiness, which is the undifferentiated mind, is the vast state,"

[166] Braitstein, *Saraha's Adamantine Songs*, 148.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Thinley Norbu, *Small Golden Key*, 104.

Saraha says in the Speech Treasury.[169] The content of the adamantine song trilogy resembles that of the *dohā* trilogy, although it appears slightly more pedagogical and less eccentric. Saraha gives definitions to mahāmudrā key terms (such as the three kāyas, the five wisdoms, etc.), instructs his students in his approach to mahāmudrā, and explains the role of the teacher. While in the *Dohākośa* Trilogy Saraha places the emphasis on co-emergence, the *Adamantine Songs* elaborates on the "four symbols of Mahāmudrā."[170]

The *Adamantines Songs* have been translated into English by Lara Braitstein.[171] She analyzes the structures of the trilogy according to their titles -- Body-, Speech-, and Mind Treasures -- as a progressive decrease in materiality and increase in subtlety. The three songs decrease in length and can be understood as an extensive, middle and condensed discussion of mahāmudrā.[172] Braitstein also parallels the titles with the three dimesions or bodies of enlightenment (*trikāya, sku gsum*), namely the transformation body (*nirmanakāya, sprul sku*), the enjoyment body (*sambohogakāya, longs sku*), and the truth body (*dharmakāya, chos sku*), as these refer to body, speech and mind in the tantric context. Again, the succession expresses an increasingly subtle treatment of the subject matter, mahāmudrā.

10. སྐུའི་མཛོད་འཆི་མེད་རྡོ་རྗེའི་གླུ།

sku'i mdzod 'chi med rdo rje'i glu/

kāyakoṣāmṛtavajragīti

(zhi 106b4-113a2, D 2269, P3115.)

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[169] Line 130, Translation Braitstein, verse 33, 231.
[170] Guenther, *Ecstatic Sponateneity,* 33. The four symbols of mahāmudrā, or "Mahāmudrā fourfold," as Guenther calls them, will be elaborated in part 2.3 (Features of Saraha's poetry) of this chapter.
[171] Braitstein, *Saraha's Adamantine Songs*, See her analysis: Chapter 3, 78-93.
[172] Braitstein, 80.

The "Body Treasury called the Immortal Adamantine Song" contains 118 verses. Schaeffer calls this text "a massive song on Mahāmudrā theory."[173] Saraha's explanations contain indications to the threefold structure of ground-, path- and fruition-mahāmudrā:

"The Great Seal is the innate within sentient beings."[174]

The Great Seal is unchangeable great bliss and,
Not dependent on a cause, the result is beyond the scope of the intellect.
The Great Seal is the complete result.
Conventionally, it is illustrated as the goal of the path.[175]

11. གསུང་གི་མཛོད་འཇམ་དབྱངས་རྡོ་རྗེའི་གླུ།

gsung gi mdzod 'jam dbyangs rdo rje'i glu/

vākkoṣarucirasvaravajragīti

(zhi 113a3-115b4, D 2270, P 3116.)

The "Speech Treasury called the Manjugośa Adamantine Song" is, with its 48 verses, much shorter than the Body Treasury. In the song, the supremacy of mahāmudrā is praised at several junctures:

By hearing the word: "Great Seal" just for an instant,
Regardless of whether or not you possess scriptural learning,
Just by this teaching, this single root, it is attained.
Whoever meditates on the innate meaning
Without wavering from pure thought, obtains [the goal].[176]

Oh! How then will Saṃsāra be abandoned?
Because causes and conditions do not exist [and] there is no object of understanding,
Mind abides in Thatness, the Great Seal.
Thatness is free of wrong perception of power, and
In one life you will accomplish the Great Seal.[177]

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[173] Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 81
[174] Line 60, trans. Braitstein, 202.
[175] Verse 7, lines 28-31. Ibid., 200.
[176] Lines 95-99, verses 25-26. trans. Braitstein.
[177] Lines 166-170,Verse 42, trans. Braitstein.

12. ཐུགས་ཀྱི་མཛོད་སྐྱེ་མེད་རྡོ་རྗེའི་གླུ།

thugs kyi mdzod skye med rdo rje'i glu/

cittakoṣājavajragīti

(zhi 115b4-117a2, D 2271, P 3117.)

The "Unborn Treasury of Mind Adamantine Song" is the shortest of the three songs and is composed of 27 verses. After a series of instructions and warnings against the erroneous practice of yogic practices, Saraha concludes the song with a wish for spiritual success.

> [From] possessing the holy Lama’s highest precepts,
> May [whoever] goes through [this] non-dual door arrive at liberation![178]

The remaining songs in the *zi* and *zhi* chapters are:

13. སྐུ་གསུང་ཐུགས་ཡིད་ལ་མི་བྱེད་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།

sku gsung thugs yid la mi byed pa zhes bya ba/

kāyavākcittāmanasikāra nāma

(zhi 117a-122a, D 2272, P 3118.)

"Unfabricated Body Speech and Mind"

14. དོ་ཧ་མཛོད་ཅེས་བྱ་བ་ཕྱག་རྒྱ་ཆེན་པོའི་མན་ངག

do ha mdzod ces bya ba phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag

dohākoṣa nāma mahāmudropadeśa

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[178] Lines 102-103,Verse 27, trans. Braitstein.

(zhi 122a3-124a7, D 2273, P 3119.)

"The Treasury of Songs of Instructions on the Great Seal," *Dohākoṣa namā mahāmudrā upadeśa*. Herbert Guenther praised it as an "altogether magnificent work, [which] gives the distinct impression of being a compilation of the basic ideas of Saraha."[179] This short song will be discussed in the following section.

15. མན་ངག་ཚིགས་སུ་བཅད་པ་བཅུ་གཉིས་པ།

man ngag tshigs su bcad pa bcu gnyis pa/

dvādaśopadeśagāthā

(zhi 124a7-125a3, D 2274, P 3121.)

"Twelve Verses of Oral Instructions"

16 .རང་བྱིན་གྱིས་བརླབ་པའི་རིམ་པ།

rang byin gyis brlab pa'i rim pa/

svādhiṣṭhānakrama

(zhi 125a3-126a6, D 2275, P 3122.)

"Self Blessing in Stages;" translated into Tibetan by Śāntabhadra (*rma ban chos 'bar*) according to the colophon of the text.

[179] Guenther, *Ecstatic Spontaneity*, 28.

17. དེ་ཁོ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་མན་ངག་རྩེ་མོ་དོ་ཧའི་གླུ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།

de kho nyid kyi man ngag rtse mo do ha'i glu zhes bya ba/

tattvopadeśaśikharadohāgīti nāma

(zhi 126b6-127b1, D2276, P 3123.)

"Song of the Pinnacle of Instructions on Thatness;"translated into Tibetan by Kṛṣṇa Paṇḍ ita.

The *zi* chapter contains the following six texts:

18. ལྟ་བསྒོམ་སྤྱོད་པ་འབྲས་བུའི་དོ་ཧའི་གླུ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།

lta bsgom spyod pa ‘bras bu’i do ha’i glu zhes bya ba/

bhāvanādṛṣṭicaryāphaladohāgītikā nāma

(zi 3a5-4a2, D 2345, P 3173.)

"Song of the View, Meditation, Action and Result"

19. དཔྱིད་ཀྱི་ཐིག་ལེ་དོ་ཧ་མཛོད་ཀྱི་གླུ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།

dpyid kyi thig le do ha mdzod kyi glu zhes bya ba/

vasantatilakadohākoṣagītikā nāma

(zi 5b2-5b6, D 2351, P 3179.)

"Song of the Treasury of *Dohā*s on the White and Red *Thigle* (Subtle Elements of the Body)"

20. ས་ར་ཧ་པའི་གླུ།

sa ra ha pa'i glu/

(zi 6a5-6b1, D 2354, P 3182.)

Two songs (no. 20 and 21) carry the plain title "Saraha's Song." They are short compositions of four couplets, which alternate with a refrain (*dhruva*). Both songs end with the signature line (the *bhanita*): "Saraha's song is complete."

In these songs Saraha uses rich, sometimes even mysterious poetic imagery to describe his spiritual understanding. In the first song, he speaks of yogic experience in emotive terms; he speaks of joy, yogic fire, bliss and the blessings of the guru. At the same time, he warns about the possible downfalls on the spiritual path, when ordinary desire or conceptual understanding interferes with the process.

The first verse reads:[180]

Homage to the Buddha
"Profound, profound!" says all the world,
Yet, within the unborn there is something joyous.
Lo, the depths of mind are difficult to know, so,
When co-emergence is dissected, it is not there."

21. ས་ར་ཧའི་གླུ།

sa ra ha'i glu/

(zi 6b1-6b4, D 2355, P 3183.)

In the second song, Saraha speaks in intimate ways of his experience of emptiness, which he personifies as "the empty ḍākinī." The ḍākinī is used generally throughout the tantric literature a symbol of emptiness. She is simultaneously emptiness' personification, its realization and its

[180] Translations by Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 83-84.

expression. A ḍākinī can be a nurturing mother, or a sexual consort. Saraha sings about the ḍ ākinī in the refrain:" I see the empty ḍākinī, milking, milking and drinking the sky." The poem conveys an impression of ecstatic dance with the elements, which the yogi does not perceive as materiality, but as the play of emptiness and compassion.

To give a taste of the song, the first verse is copied here:[181]

Intertwined are the natures of emptiness and compassion
Indivisible, unceasing, emptiness exists
I see the empty ḍākinī,
Milking, milking, and drinking the sky.

22. ཕྱག་རྒྱ་ཆེན་པོའི་མན་ངག་རྡོ་རྗེ་གསང་བའི་གླུ།

phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag rdo rje gsang ba'i glu/

mahāmudropadeśavajraguhyagīti

(zi 55b7-62b6, D 2440, P 3268.)

"Secret Vajra Song of Mahāmudrā Instructions;" translated into Tibetan by Kamalaśīla, *ston pa seng ge rgyal po*).

A third group of texts attributed to Saraha can be found in the Chapters *phu* and *mu.* These four relatively short texts are four translations of essentially the same *sādhana* dedicated to *Lokeśvara*:

23. འཇིག་རྟེན་གསུམ་དབང་དུ་བྱེད་པའི་འཇིག་རྟེན་དབང་ཕྱུག་གི་སྒྲུབ་ཐབས།

'jig rten gsum dbang du byed pa'i 'jig rten dbang phyug gi sgrub thabs/

trailokavaśaṃkaralokeśvarasādhana

[181] Ibid.

(phu 182b2-183a6, D 3427, P 4248.)

"Sādhana of the Lord of the World who Masters the Three Worlds;" translated by Abhaya (*tshul khrims rgyal mtshan*).

24. འཇིག་རྟེན་དབང་ཕྱུག་འཇིག་རྟེན་གསུམ་དབང་དུ་མཛད་པའི་སྒྲུབ་ཐབས།

'jig rten dbang phyug 'jig rten gsum dbang du mdzad pa'i sgrub thabs/

trailokavaśaṃkaralokeśvarasādhana

(phu 183a6-184a6, D 3164, P 3985.)

"Sādhana of Mastering the Three Worlds by the Lord of the World;" translated by Ratnākara (*tshul rgyal*).

25. ཁམས་གསུམ་དབང་དུ་བྱེད་པའི་སྤྱན་རས་གཟིགས་དབང་ཕྱུག་གི་སྒྲུབ་པའི་ཐབས།

khams gsum dbang du byed pa'i spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug gi sgrub pa'i thabs/

trailokavaśaṃkaralokiteśvarasādana

(mu 46b2-47a7, D 3371, P 4192.)

"Sādhana of Lord *Chenrezig* who Controls the Three Realms,"translated by Ba ri (*don yod rdo rje*).

26.འཇིག་རྟེན་གསུམ་པོ་དབང་དུ་བྱེད་པའི་འཇིག་རྟེན་དབང་ཕྱུག་གི་སྒྲུབ་པའི་ཐབས།

'jig rten gsum po dbang du byed pa'i 'jig rten dbang phyug gi sgrub pa'i thabs/

trailokavaśaṃkaralokeśvarasādana

(mu 88a1-88b3, D 3427, P 4248.)

"Sādhana of the Lord of the World who Masters the Three Worlds;" transled by Drakpa Gyaltsen (*grags pa rgyal mtshan*).

This concludes the list of Saraha's works In the Derge Tengyur.[182]

2.2. The Caryāpāda

The *Caryāpāda* is a collection of forty-six songs, *caryā gīti*, from twenty-two different poets and is written in Old Bengali - the earliest known form of Bengali. It was discovered by Haraprasād Śāstrī in 1916 in the library of the King of Nepal.[183] Later on, in 1938, Dr. Probodh Ch. Bagchi found Tibetan equivalents of the songs, and the collection was eventually expanded to its current fifty songs. This serves as further proof of the popularity of those songs in Tibet and Nepal.

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[182] From the Peking Edition of the Tengyur, Guenther lists the following works by Saraha:

- *Dohākosa-gīti* (*do ha mdzod kyi glu*, People *Dohā*) *bstan 'gyur*, Peking ed.: vol. *Mi*, fols. 71-81b. Western editions: see P.C. Bagchi and M. Shahidullah)
- *Dohākosa upadesagīti* (*mi zad pa'i gter mdzod man ngag gi glu*, Queen *Dohā*) *bstan 'gyur*, Peking ed.: vol. *Tsi*, fols. 34a-39b.
- *Dohākosa namā caryāgīti* (*do ha mdzod ces bya ba spyod pa'i rdzu*, King *Dohā*) *bstan 'gyur*, Peking ed.: vol. *Tsi*, fols. 31b-34a.
- *Kāyakosa amrta vajragīti* (*sku'i mdzod 'chi med rdo rje'i glu*) *bstan 'gyur*, Peking ed.: vol. *Tsi*, fols. 78a-85a.
- *Vākkasa rucira svara vajragīti* (*gsung gi mdzod 'jam byangs rdo rje'i glu*) *bstan 'gyur*, Peking ed.: vol. *Tsi*, fols. 85a-88a.
- *Cittakosa aja vajragītī (thugs kyi mdzod skye med rdo rje'i glu*) *bstan 'gyur*, Peking ed.: vol. *Tsi*, fols. 88a-89b.
- *Dohākosa namā mahāmudrā upadesa* (*do ha mdzod ces bya ba phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag*) *bstan 'gyur*, Peking ed.: vol. *Mi*, fols. 95a-97a.

[183] The collection is called 'Caryacarya Viniscaya.'

These songs are serious poems of spiritual, mystic, heroic or laudatory character. Their form is that of a *dhrupad*: Four to six couplets alternate with a refrain (*dhruvapāda*), which is repeated after each couplet, as in the case of the two "Saraha's Song" mentioned previously. As a further characteristic, the name of the *rāga* (musical mood) and the composer's name are mentioned in the top line.[184]

Singing was certainly not an orthodox Buddhist practice. Singing was in fact part of the distracting activities that Buddha forbade his disciples; monks and nuns take a vow not to engage in singing or dancing.[185] The performance of songs in the *siddha* tradition can be considered as breaking a taboo - one of many. Conventional Buddhism, including vajrayāna liturgy is regularly criticized or ridiculed in all the different types of songs.

Among the fifty songs of the *Caryāpāda*, four give Saraha's name as composer: Nos. 22, 32, 38, and 39. Other authors are well known *siddhas* such as Kāṇha, Bhusuku, Luipa, Kukuripa, Virūpa, and others. These poets have in common that they proclaim *sahaja* - the innate, the coemergent - as the highest spiritual goal.[186] This idea will be elucidated further in the following section.

The translation of one of Saraha's songs in this collection may not be of good quality, but gives a taste of this particular poetry:

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[184] Nijenhuis, *Indian Music: History and Structure,* 83.

[185] In the Uposattha Sutta, Anguttara Nikaya 8.41, Buddha Shakyamuni explains the 8 main vows of monastics. The seventh rule states:
"Bhikkhus. Ariyan disciples in this Religion reflect thus:
"'All arahants, for as long as life lasts, have given up singing and dancing, the playing of musical instruments and the watching of entertainments, which are stumbling blocks to that which is wholesome. Nor do they bedeck themselves with ornaments, flowers or perfume.'
"All of you have given up singing and dancing, the playing of musical instruments and the watching of entertainments, which are stumbling blocks to that which is wholesome. You do not bedeck yourselves with ornaments, flowers or perfume. For all of this day and night, in this manner, you will be known as having followed the arahants, and the Uposatha will have been observed by you. This is the seventh factor of the Uposatha."
Translated from the Pali by Ñanavara Thera and Bhikkhu Kantasilo
(http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an08/an08.041.vaka.html.)

[186] See Reginald Ray, "Reassessing Bengal Blackie," 178.

Caryāpāda 22
Poet: Sarahapada, Rāga Gunjari

By making his own saṃsāra and nirvāṇa
Man ties himself to it.
I do not know, unknown yogi,
How birth, death and life happen.
Death is like birth.
There is no difference between living and dying.
One who is afraid of birth and death
Should desire medicine or chemistry.
Those who travel in the three worlds
Because of the perpetuation of action
Cannot become immortal.[187]

2.3. Features and Content of Saraha's Songs

One can read Saraha's songs as eccentric expressions of spiritual experience. The fact that Tibetan scholars integrated them in the canons, however, indicates that they were considered to be more than that. They were regarded as instructions providing direction for practitioners on the path to the highest spiritual achievement. These instructions unfold in a creative, rather unsystematic way in Saraha's songs. It is difficult to identify a progression of ideas, let alone a structured doctrine. Characteristically Saraha jumps from one topic to another, and the underlying connection is not always obvious. As discussed previously, the fact that these songs were probably put together by disciples of Saraha, or even later tantric adepts, probably contributed to the inconsistent presentation of Saraha's teaching.

The Saraha-scholar Roger Jackson gives a rather extensive analysis of the major themes in Saraha's songs.[188] He observes six themes that stand out: "(1) a rhetoric of paradox; (2) cultural critique; (3) focus on the innate; (4) affirmation of the body, the senses, and sexuality;

[187] Moudud, *A Thousand Year Old Bengal, Mystic Poetry.*.
[188] He includes Tilopa and Kanha in his reflections, basing them on Saraha's *People's Dohā*, Kanha's *Treasury of Couplets* and Tilopa's *Treasury of Couplets*. Roger Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 16-40.

(5) promotion of certain yogic techniques; and (6) celebration of the guru."[189] The choice of these themes suggests strongly a tantric background. Except for the first two, all other points deal directly or indirectly with tantric practice. In the context of the mahāmudrā meditation, as it is exemplified by Saraha's *Mahāmudrā Upadeśa Dohā*, and also by the recension of Saraha's teachings in Tibetan mahāmudrā manuals, the emphasis is on the following themes: (1) focus on the ultimate; (2) promotion of certain spiritual practices, rejection of others; (3) a rhetoric style using paradox and questions; and (4) devotion to the guru.

Focus on the ultimate. At times, Saraha's songs leave the impression that he taught one single topic, which he circles and approaches in infinite ways. He seems to be inciting his audience to answer the question of all questions: What is the human potential developed to its fullest? Or, in other words, what is absolute reality, buddhahood, mahāmudrā and co-emergence (*sahaja*)? The same question can be asked (and has been asked) in infinite ways. Saraha wants his disciples, his audience to find personal answers about ultimate reality. He himself gives indications using pictoral, emotional, and cognitive elements.[190] This approach has been mentioned by the 16th century Tibetan commentator, Karma Trinlaypa:

> When the *dohā*s are taught, a threefold procedure is employed: objectively with reference to the outer world by similes, subjectively by experiencing by himself what it is about, and mystically by the symbol language of the Ḍākas.[191] The first makes use of the thirty-five similes such as the sky and a jewel , the second outlines the division into insight, contemplation, action and goal-realization, and the third resorts to the terms "memory," "non-memory," "unorigination," and "transcendence. And this is very appropriate.[192]

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189 Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 16.

190 Herbert Guenther, *The Royal Song of Saraha,* 24.

191 Karma Trinlaypa explains in the same commentary, fols 58b the term Dāka: "Heroes [i.e. spiritual giants] and yogis walk over the sky by their magic powers and so are called 'sky walkers.' Their mystic language, which expresses itself in such symbol-terms such as 'memory,' 'nonmemory,' and so on is difficult to understand by ordinary people. The real meaning is that the a priori awareness which intuits the evidence of being, which is like celestial space, is a kind of 'going over it.'"

192 Karma Trinlaypa citing his guru, in the commentary *do ha skor gsum gyi ti ka sems kyi rnam thar ston pa'i me long,* fold 10a ff. Trans. by Guenther in *Royal Song*, 23.

The pictoral approach refers to Saraha's extensive use of similes. The most frequent simile used to describe the mind is the sky, or space. Saraha is in no way unique in the usage of this image. Space, being without center and without limits, is the reference in the outer world that comes closest to the reality of the mind. Space was experienced as not material - even though modern physics might not agree with this description. Being intangible, space is similar to the ungraspable mind. In the forty-eight verses of the *Mahāmudrā Upadeśa*, space is referred to eleven times. Several images are related to the space-simile, such as the image of flying, which is compared to the movement of the mind;[193] and sun light,[194] which illustrates the mind's clarity aspect.

Equally important is the simile of water. It is used in various contexts to illustrate the twofold aspect of reality - variety and unity, or oneness. The latter refers to the third mahāmudrā level, the yoga of one taste. The water of "[t]he Ganges and various other rivers /All taste the same in the salty ocean," says Saraha,[195] thereby implying that also all phenomena have one taste. Water and waves[196] illustrate that the essence, i.e. the ultimate reality, and appearances, i.e. conventional reality, are not two different things.

The qualities of mind are evoked with images of the wish-fulfilling jewel, or the lotus, which grows clear white out of the mud. The ecstatic experience of mind in its full potential is compared to the lion's roar, which delights those who are familiar with it, but frightens everyone else.[197]

A panoply of similes stands for the illusory appearances that blind those frightened and confused ones. Traditionally there is a list of eight similes (*sgyu ma'i dpe brgyad*): dream;

[193] *Mahāmudrā Upadeśa,* verse 26.
[194] Ibid .,verse 38.
[195] Ibid. ,verse 23, compare to *People's Dohā,* verse 78b: "Just as salt dissolves in water, so mind dissolves into its nature." Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 98.
[196] Ibid., verse 32.
[197] *Mahāmudrā Upadeśa* , verse 17.

illusion; optical illusion; mirage; reflection of the moon in water; echo; castle in the sky; and apparition.[198] The *Dohākosa Mahāmudrā Upadeśa* refers to a few of them, evoking the rest of the list, though - "illusions, mirages, reflections," (verse 22) and dreams (verse 20). All of them characterize the ephemeral character of phenomena. Dream experience is particularly fitting, because a dreaming person realizes his or her delusion the moment he or she wakes up. This "awakening to reality" parallels the awakeing of a buddha, who sees through saṃsāric illusion.

Karma Trinlaypa describes this emotional approach as Saraha's articulation of his subjective experience of "what it is about." Saraha's songs are interspersed with first-person statements of experiences of the fundamental reality of mind. These statements convey a powerful sense of certainty and elation, which give the listener or reader a sense of why Saraha, as well as other *siddhas*, could develop an attitude of superiority and authority to all domains of the secular and sacred world.[199]

Two examples of the *Mahāmudra Upadeśa Dohā* illustrate Saraha's exhalted authority:

12
I realized immutability in the state of suchness.
I came to know the beginning and end of myself.
Looking into myself [to see whether] there was an identity left,
I looked into oneness and did not see a single thing.

35
Hey! In the *yoga* of innate non-duality,
What thing is there to abandon or to adopt?
I don't let go of any phenomena.
You, [my] child, follow this,
And do not speak of things to do!

Numerous are the expressions of joy and bliss that accompany realization on the yogic path. Once a meditator has realized emptiness, he or she experiences every perception as blissful. In line 111 of the *Mahāmudrā Upadeśa Dohā,* Saraha says: "Variety has one taste: that of

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[198] The twelve similes in Tibetan: *rmi lam, sgyu ma, mig yor, smig rgyu, chu zla, dri za'i grong khyer, sprul pa.*
[199] More on that in Davidson, "Reframing Sahaja," 67-71.

uninterrupted great bliss."[200] And in the *People's Dohā*: "It's utmost great bliss: without it, Saraha declares, you get nowhere."[201] In the process of the four empowerments, the experience of bliss and emptiness serve as the basis for the pointing-out instructions of the guru. Therefore, Saraha declares bliss to be an indispensable component for the realization of the ultimate reality of mind. ḍāka

The cognitive elements in Saraha's songs, mentioned by Karma Trinlaypa as "the symbol language of the Ḍākas," refer to the various terms of the "mystic language" used by the *siddhas* to speak about the unspeakable. Mystics were faced with the dilemma that they had experienced a state of being they could not put in words, but which they wanted to explain for their fellow beings. Motivated by their mahāyāna commitment to liberate all sentient beings, they developed multiple ways to help others discover that same state of liberation.

Karma Trinlaypa gives four specific terms (*brda' bzhi,* lit. four symbols) as examples of Ḍāka language, namely "memory, nonmemory, nonorigination, release from the intellect,"[202] alternatively translated as "mindfulness, non-minding, the unborn and beyond the intellect."[203] Their Tibetan rendering is *dran pa, dran med, skye (ba) med (pa),* and *blo (las) 'das (pa)*. These terms occur in Karma Trinlaypa's story about Saraha's life in the crucial passage of Saraha's meeting with the female arrow smith. While watching her concentrated fabrication of an arrow, Saraha gains an intuitive understanding of the symbolic meanings of her work. He sees the"fourfold split at the base"[204]of the arrow as this fourfold symbolism of mahāmudrā. We find an elaboration on these terms in the *King Dohā*, verses 27 - 33.

[200] See page 39 of this chapter.
[201] Verse 31, Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 68.
[202] Guenther, *Royal Song,* 6.
[203] Thrangu, *Song for the King,* 100.
[204] Karma Trinlaypa in Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 21.

The contemporary Buddhist scholar Thrangu Rinpoche refers to these four terms as Saraha's Four Symbols and parallels them with the four joys, the four seals and the four meditative absorptions (*samādhi*) of the sūtra tradition.[205] According to his explanations, the first symbol, "mindfulness," refers to a state of "certainty about the illusory nature of phenomenon."[206] "Non-minding," the second symbol, refers to an experience of "recogniz[ing] the emptiness of mindfulness itself."[207] The third term, "unborn," refers to the realization that all phenomena are "empty, and therfore without true arising, they are unborn."[208] Finally, the fourth symbol refers to the direct experience of things as they are, and is therefore called "beyond the intellect."[209]

The definitions of these four terms, however brief, suffice to show that these words should not be confused with connotations they have in ordinary language.[210] They have to be understood as symbols for certain experiences, which help the student to develop a "dynamic self-creation"[211] of the related experience. The language of Saraha's songs has to be understood on different levels according to the level of realization of the practitioner.[212]

The various terms Saraha uses to describe ultimate reality are also self-secret for the non-initiated. The list of key words include terms such as the "innate/ coemergent;" "coemergent union;" "coemergent wisdom;" *dharmakāya*; *dharmatā*; *dharmadhātu*; and "suchness." These words shed light on different aspects of enlightened mind. They do not have a static meaning, but have undergone developments over time.[213] Despite the fact that Saraha used language as an

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[205] Thrangu Rinpoche, *A Song for the King,* 100.
[206] Ibid., 93.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid., 94.
[209] More on the discussion of these terms: Guenther, *Ecstatic Spontaneity*, 32-43. Braitstein, 90-93.
[210] Guenther, *Royal Song*, n5.
[211] Ibid., 27.
[212] More on the hermeneutics of mystic language: Braitstein, *Saraha's Adamantine Songs,* 151-154.
[213] See Davidson "Reframing Sahaja."

indispensable and powerful tool to communicate with his students, he regularly warns his audience about the limits and pitfalls of language. "The whole world is word bound - nobody gets past words; but resist words, and you'll get past words."[214]

Spiritual practices. Chapter One gave an introduction to Saraha's meditation technique of minimal intervention. His approach is reflected in his songs in two ways. He criticizes techniques that he considers inferior, and promotes those he deems successful. His criticism takes on the form of mockery, disdain and rhetorical questions. These are not only aimed at non-Buddhist yogis, but also at his fellow Buddhists.

Both trilogies, namely the *People's Dohā* and the *Body Treasury,* open with Saraha's series of attacks against the practices of his contemporary spiritual practitioners, such as the Brahmins, Śaivite ascetics, and Jains. But he does not spare the Buddhist monks and nuns, calling them "dress-up friars and ascetics."[215] Saraha expresses a low opinion of common Buddhist practices such as the so-called accumulation of merit, i.e. the exercise of virtuous actions. He does likewise to Buddhist vajrayāna methods such as receiving empowerments, meditation with breath control and the manipulation of subtle energies.

In the *People's Dohā,* we see an example of a rhetorical question with an underlying criticism of conventional spiritual practices that aim at anything less than the ultimate goal:

> What use are lamps? What use is offered food? What is mantra practice supposed to do?[216]

These spiritual exercises were commonly considered integral parts of the spiritual path: The practice of making offerings of lights, flowers, foods, and other valuables are part of

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[214] Saraha's verse 88 of the People's *Dohā*, in Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 103.
[215] *People's Dohā*, verse 10, trans. Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 57.
[216] Verse 14, Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 60. Teachings such as these were considered harmful to the spread of Buddhism in Tibet, because they could be understood literally. For more on this problematic, see Schaeffer, *Dreaming the Great Brahmin,* 61-62.

practicing the transcendent quality (*parāmitā*)[217] of generosity. The repetitious recitation of mantras is an important aspect of *sādhana* practice. It is believed this helps focus the mind and conveys powers on the practitioner. And yet, Saraha seems to imply the worthlessness of these disciplines. In the *Mind Treasury,* he makes an even stronger statement against yogic practices, comparing them to defective symptoms of a disease:

> Drawing [energies] up and down the turning centers (*'khor lo*), [If you are] guided by those methods, the truth cannot be found. Although [you may] grasp and eject and unite and ignite, there is no difference between [these breath-control practices] and a fool suffering from asthma.[218]

Code words such as "grasp," "eject," "unite" and "ignite" refer to advanced yogic practices. These practices are believed to be a means to master subtle energies circling through channels and cakras (i.e."turning centers," *'khorlo*) in the body via breath control techniques, thereby bringing about elevated spiritual mind states.[219] If Saraha does not approve of yogic techniques, we might expect him to favor meditation techniques that involve nothing else but working directly with the mind. Instead, we read in the *People's Dohā*:

> Meditation: why look for freedom in a lie?[220]
> How will meditation get you free?[221]

These are provocative, rhetorical questions that might be addressed at meditators, Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike, who fail to recognize the highest spiritual goal of ultimate liberation. Other quotations give a more differentiated picture. Saraha directs his criticism

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217 The practice of the six transcendent qualities or perfections (*parāmitā, pha rol tu phyin*) is an essential part of thegradual sūtra Mahayana system, known as Parāmitayāna. The six *parāmitās* are generosity, moral ethics, patience, perseverance, meditative concentration, and wisdom awareness. Their gradual practice is described in terms of the Five Paths or Ten Bodhisattva Bhumis. Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* is a classical example of a presentation of the gradual path of the Parāmitayāna.

218 Verse 25, lines 93-96, trans. Braitstein, 241.

219 On the tantric view of the body (channels, winds, vital essences) see Kongtrul, *Systems of Buddhist Tantra,* 169 -185.

220 *People's Dohā*, Verse 33, trans. Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 69.

221 Verse 14, Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 60

against meditation techniques that enhance the dualistic grasp, as the following two quotations show:

> Since Thatness is not attained by tip-of-the-nose meditation, etc,
> Even if you apply yourself to its accomplishment, it is not the ultimate.[222]
>
> That defined calm-abiding
> which is meditative equipoise and post-meditation, is
> Not ultimate, it is not practiced by a mind in meditation.[223]

Saraha endorses, however, those meditations that lead to the experience and realization of non-duality, or one-taste. "Through non-dual meditation the path is quickly and irreversibly entered,"[224] he says in the *Speech Treasury.* What is a meditator supposed to do then? According to Saraha's poems, awakening (or "authentic mind" as he calls it in the following verse) is inherent in the mind but obscured through mental fabrications. The meditators' task is to strip away these obscurations by means of "cutting" discursive thought and seeing directly into "the essence" of thought. Both instructions indicate an attempt to short-circuit any kind of intellectual interference in the spiritual process.

> Cut the root [of hope and fear] and the authentic mind [will appear] like space!
> Don't meditate, don't do anything with your mind![225]
>
> When memories or thoughts arise, look [directly] into their essence![226]
> Realize water and waves as not being two [different things]!
> In Mahāmudrā there is nothing to do with the mind.
> There is not one iota of meditation to do. Therefore don't meditate!

A suspicious attitude towards meditation is not in itself an unusual behavior in Buddhist history. Its founder, Siddhārtha Gautama, is reported to have studied with meditation teachers

[222] *Speech Treasury*, lines 77-78, trans. Braitstein, 229. (translation revised by Braitstein)
[223] *Body Treasury*, lines 112-114, trans. Braitstein, 205. (translation revised by Braitstein)
[224] *Speech Treasury*, line 46, trans. Braitstein, 227. (translation revised by Braitstein)
[225] *yid la mi byed* = not taking to mind, trans, by Daniel Brown. One of the two key points of Saraha, according to him, the other one being mindfulness without activity. Verse 27 of the *Treasury of Couplets on Mahāmudrā Instructions,* translation mine. See part 2.5. of this chapter.
[226] Alternative translation: When ordinary thoughts arise, see them as suchness. Verse 32 of the *Treasury of Couplets on Mahāmudrā Instructions,* translation mine. Ibid.

Alara Kalama and Udraka Ramaputra, whose techniques he first mastered but later discarded as being insufficient for his quest of ultimate liberation.[227] Another famous discussion about the "correct" approach to meditation is the Samye debate (*bsam yas*, c.792-794) between Indian and Chinese masters in Tibet over the superiority of gradual versus sudden enlightenment.[228]

There are two possibilities of evaluating Saraha's criticism of meditation techniques involving formal discipline. He might have seen them as a necessity only at an initial stage of the path, to be abandonned at later stages of spiritual attainments, or else as downright harmful and misleading, even for beginners. Several clues suggest that the former interpretation is more probable.

Saraha is believed to be himself an author of *sādhana* literature and was therefore himself a practitioner of tantric disciplines. Another small indication is the last verse of the *Queen Dohā*, where Saraha acknowledges the value of the gradual path, which commonly includes formal practices of quieting the mind in its beginning stages.

> A yogi who wants [to live] this ultimate pristine awareness
> may go about it in a gradual or instantaneous manner,...[229]

Lastly, from the first of his "four symbols of mahāmudrā," being mindfulness (*dran pa*), we may also infer that Saraha taught a form of formal spiritual practice, which in advanced stages was replaced by "methods" of releasing tension and dualistic grasping. Any attempt to comprehend Saraha's entire teaching system will fail, however, due to lack of reliable information.

Rhetorical style of paradox and questions. Saraha has a very engaged -- and engaging -- teaching style. He calls out to his listeners "hey, you," "boy," or insults them as "fool." Far

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[227]The Columbia Encyclopedia, "Buddha."
[228] For more on the Samye debate, see: Kapstein, *Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism.*
[229] *Queen Dohākośa,* verse 80, trans. Guenther, *Ecstatic Sponataneity,* 149.

from being a reserved, self-effacing author, he shoots a lot of questions at his students—questions that cannot be answered intellectually. These rhetorical questions have the function of "pointing-out instructions,"[230] by which a teacher helps the disciple to recognize the fundamental nature of mind. This first glimpse of understanding is indispensable to establish the correct view of this most subtle level of mind. It serves consequently as an orientation for the practitioner's meditation and has to be stabilized through familiarization.

In the forty-eight verses of the *Treasury of Couplets on Mahāmudrā Instructions (Mahāmudrā Upadeśa Dohā)*, for example, one can count twelve questions. Saraha asks: "What is there to exist in primordial selflessness?"[231] And he goes on with: "However, without mind - who could realize even one dharma?"[232]

This excerpt displays another character of Saraha's composition, the use of paradoxical language. In these two lines, Saraha addresses the classical Buddhist contradiction between non-existence (in primordial selflessness) and existence (of a mind capable of cognition). Paradox is a common feature of much of the *Mahāyāna* literature, in which there is an attempt to express the two dimensions of reality: the conventional and the ultimate. The ultimate level evades the intellectual understanding of human beings. Concepts of existence or non-existence are irrelevant on that level. Phenomena are said to be "empty," even though what exactly empty means is explained differently by different philosophical traditions. Buddhists do not negate, however, that on the conventional level, phenomena do appear. Language does exist conventionally and it has the capacity to incite understanding of the ultimate. Therefore language is used as a skillful means. The rhetoric of paradox has the double function of expressing the co-existence of the two

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[230] *ngo sprod* : pointing-out instruction, lit. to bring face to face with, to introduce.
[231] Verse 7.
[232] Ibid.

levels of reality, as well as being a means that pushes the listener or reader to explore consciousness beyond reason and logic.[233]

Devotion to the guru. On many occasions, Saraha emphasizes the necessity of a guru or lama (*bla ma*) for the spiritual path. He teaches that without the guidance of an accomplished teacher, who is holder of a transmission lineage, the mahāmudrā practitioner is not able to reach the highest goal. Not only does the teacher assist with his or her experience and wisdom, but devotional practice and worship of the guru may trigger mental attitudes which are highly conducive to opening the mind, and to the realization of emptiness. Verses 5 and 6 of the *Speech Treasury* summarize the role of the guru in the disciple's spiritual progress.

> The teachings, transmissions, commentary and essential instructions from the lama reveal later;
> With the right transmission and reasoning, and desiring to realize the intrinsic characteristic,
> Relying on the lama, realization comes from the pure accomplishment of the essential instructions,
> And if you worship the Lama, you will accomplish spontaneous highest bliss.
> Bow at the Lama's feet, because his actions are free of defilement.
> "If you worship the Lama, great blessings will arise" declared the Conqueror (the Buddha).[234]

Saraha addresses the importance of the guru in every song of his two trilogies. Curiously, however, it is altogether missing in the *Treasury of Couplets on Mahāmudrā Instructions (Mahāmudrā Upadeśa Dohā)*.[235]

This chapter has so far presented an overview of Saraha's work. The research focused on the collection in the Tibetan Derge canon and the Caryāpāda. Saraha's most prominent works are

[233] More on the rhetoric of paradox in Jackson *Tantric Treasures,* 16-19.
[234] Lines 19-24 of the Speech Treasury, trans. Braitstein, dissertation 225. Also in the *People's Dohā*, guru devotion is a recurring topic. More than a dozen verses mention the guru. See Jackson's discussion of the guru in *Tantric Treasures,* 37-40.
[235] The title *Upadeśa - Instructions* indicate by inference the presence of a guru. See below 2.4.

his two trilogies, the *Treasury of Couplets* and the *Adamintine Songs*. These six songs give insight into Saraha's mahāmudrā teachings and his pedagogical style.

In his teachings, Saraha attempts the impossible and tries to express in words his experience of the ultimate, a dimension beyond words. With his instructional songs, Saraha wants to inspire others to find a path to spiritual liberation, and he does so with a very engaging style, using rhetoric questions, provocations and paradoxical language. His provocations are aimed at practitioners who might fall into the trap of subtle dualistic clinging, and he suggests a meditation style of minimal intervention or even passivity. Instead of putting efforts into spiritual exercises, he advises the practitioners to relax, to dissolve discursive thinking, to worship the guru -- and he promises that this will enable inborn wisdom to reveal itself.

The following portion of the chapter introduces Saraha's *Treasury of Couplets on Mahāmudrā Instructions*. This poem was chosen for its relevance as a piece of mahāmudrā literature. It is also the first translation of this text into a Western language.

2.4. Introduction to Saraha's *Treasury of Couplets on Mahāmudrā Instructions*

The *Dohākosa namā mahāmudrā upadeśa* is an "altogether magnificent work, [which] gives the distinct impression of being a compilation of the basic ideas of Saraha,"[236] writes Herbert Guenther. Other than this praise, no commentary or translation of Saraha's *Treasury of Couplets on Mahāmudrā Instructions* seem to exist in either Tibetan or a western language. The following analysis is therefore simply a suggested interpretation, based on knowledge of similar texts. The analysis attempts to identify the different sections of the poem and to elucidate some of its key points. The song consists of a title, a praise, five sections each introduced by the

[236] Guenther, *Ecstatic Spontaneity*, 28.

exclamation "Kye Ho," (meaning "Hey, you"),[237] a final wishing prayer and a colophon by the translator.

The title of this song, given in Sanskrit and Tibetan, indicates that its content will be concerned with mahāmudrā teachings in the style of oral instructions (*upadeśa, man ngag*). Traditionally transmitted directly from guru to disciple, these instructions were indispensable for the correct understanding and practice of mahāmudrā texts. The guru had to complement or decipher the meditation manual. Oral instructions were used as a guarantee to keep practitioners from experimenting with mahāmudrā meditation without the guidance of a teacher by simply relying on texts. The need for oral explanations from a realized master kept the transmission lineages alive and ensured to a certain degree their authenticity.

The *dohā* starts out with two praises, one to Vajrayoginī, a second to "coemergent wisdom dharmakāya great bliss." It is interesting to find a praise to the tantric yidam (*yi dam*) Vajrayoginī at the beginning of this mahāmudrā *dohā*, in which references to tantra are otherwise scarce. However, Vajrayoginī is in the tantric world the embodiment of "coemergent wisdom dharmakāya great bliss" and represents therefore the realization of mahāmudrā.

One is reminded of the story of the renowned Nyingma mystic, Longchenpa, who sees Vajrayoginī in a vision and asks in astonishment how he could have a vision without ever having practiced her *sādhana.* She replies: "Am I a deity upon whom you must meditate? Am I an object of worship? Do you not know that I am ever present before the yogins who observe their commitments and who have realization? Throughout all your lives, I have never been with nor without you."[238]

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[237] An exception to this is the first part which start without the exclamation.
[238] Dujom Rinpoche, *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism*, in "Lifestory of Longchen," 585.

It was popular among the siddhas to practice mother tantra, or yoginī tantra, and the practice of *Vajrayoginī*, either alone or as the consort of a male deity, such as *Hevajra* or *Cakrasamvara*. Although there is no evidence of this as far as Saraha is concerned, we have seen the extraordinary role of women in his life. In the tantric world, the distinction between woman and ḍākinī becomes blurred. A ḍākinī is a female spiritual messenger or a meditation deity (*yi dam*), as in the case of *Vajrayoginī*. Ḍākinīs appear to tantric pratitioners in many shapes -- young, old, beautiful, repulsive, etc. By their tantric precepts, the practitioners are held to see all women as the ḍākinī. *Vajrayoginī*, being the ultimate ḍākinī, has the role of initiating the yogi into the realm of bliss and emptiness

The main part of the song can be understood as an outline of the basic features of a mahāmudrā teaching: the view, path, result and activity.

The first part, verses 1-14, emphasizes the mahāmudrā view. Saraha explains reality to be space-like and the mind as the source of all phenomena (line 15), although mind is empty of intrinsic existence (line 16). This emptiness is however not a blank nothingness, but dynamic manifestation, experienced as bliss (line 32). The manifestations of the mind are experienced as the truth body (*dharmakāya*, *chos sku*).

In a short second part, verses 15-18, Saraha relates his personal spiritual realization in ecstatic expressions. He uses the metaphor of the lion's roar for the powerful joy that accompanies realization.

The third part, verses 19-34, consists of a variety of meditation teachings in the form of pointing-out instructions, rhetorical questions and similes. Saraha explains a meditation approach that relies on minimal intervention, or non-action, and negates all formal practice. He makes

reference to one taste and great bliss (verse 30) -- realizations corresponding to the advanced level of the third yoga of mahāmudrā.

The fourth part, verses 35-37, is again a very short section that deals with the result of spiritual discipline. Saraha expresses realization in the first person, emphasizing that even the experience of union (*yoga*) has to be transcended. With the help of similes he references the state of non-meditation: He compares it to the intentionlessness of a madman or a child.

The fifth part, verses 38-47, starts with the joyful exclamation "*e ma*" - how wonderful! Starting with the traditional image for the immaculate mind -- a lotus growing in the mud -- the author mentions for the first time compassionate activity as a result of realization. A traditional *Mahāyāna* teaching, "exchanging oneself with others" (verse 40), is set into the context of mahāmudrā realization.[239] This part includes topics belonging to the post-meditative activity of a yogi. Saraha warns (again) to not artificially construct a spiritual realization, as the result has to be totally natural. Even the most sublime designation ("*Dorje Chang*") does not make the result genuine, he says. Instead, the conceptualizing activity of the mind itself has to be realized as ultimate reality. Saraha concludes with this statement of the fundamental equality of ground, path and fruition mahāmudrā.

Verse 48 is a concluding wishing prayer. It condenses enlightened activity with its two aspects: altruistic action on the relative level, and concomitant awareness of its ultimate emptiness. The last verse is a colophon, which identifies the author of the oral instruction as the hermit Saraha, and the translator as the Khenpo Śri Vairocana Rakśita.The title hermit (*ri krod pa*) may indicate that this is a song from Saraha's later years, which he spent, according to some of his life stories, in seclusion. The translator Vairocana Rakśita was himself a disciple in the

[239] The exchange of oneself with others is one of the central teachings of the Bodhisattva path. This teaching was first popularized in the 8th century with Shāntideva's *Bodhicharyāvatāra*, translated as *The Way of the Bodhisattva.* Verse 8.120 says: Those desiring speedily to be/ A refuge for themselves and others/ Should make the interchange of "i" and "other,"/And thus embrace a sacred mystery. Trans. Padmakara Translation Group.

lineage of Saraha and Maitrīpa, who traveled to Tibet in the eleventh/twelfth century and was very active in the spread of Mahāmudrā teachings. There are indications that the first Karmapa, Düsum Khyenpa, studied with him as well.[240]

The following translation is structured according to my analysis of the poem. The Tibetan text does not indicate the verses (stanzas). As is common for Tibetan text, it is an uninterrupted sequence of lines without paragraphs or other demarcations. For reasons of clarity, I have grouped lines to verses where it seemed appropriate. In addition, the lines are numbered to allow readers to compare easily this text with any other edition available to them.

2.5. Saraha's *Treasury of Couplets on Mahāmudrā Instructions*

Title

gya gar skad du
dohā kosha na ma ma ha' mu dra u pa de zha
bod skad du
do ha mdzod ches bya ba phyag rgya chen po'(i?) man ngag

In the language of India: *Dohā koṣa mahāmudrā upadeśa*
In the language of Tibet: The Treasury of Couplets of Oral Instructions on the Great Seal[241]

Praise

dpal rdo rje rnal 'byor ma la phyag 'tshal lo
lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes chos kyi sku bde chen po la phyag 'tshal lo

I prostrate to the glorious *Vajrayoginī.*
Coemergent[242] wisdom *dharmakāya* great bliss, I prostrate to you.

1 - First Part

ji ltar dngos dang dngos med snang stong dang
rgyu dang mi rgyu g.yo dang mi g.yo ba
thams cad ma lus nam mkha'i rang bzhin las
dus rnams kun du nam yang g.yo ba med

[240] For more information on Vairocana Rakśita: Kurtis Schaeffer, "The Religious Career of Vairocanavajra."
[241] Alternative translations: Mahāmudrā, Great Imprint of Reality.
[242] Alternative translations: innate, simultaneous.

The material and the nonmaterial [world] are empty appearance.[243]
So are causality and non-causality,[244] movement and non-movement.
Everything without exception [has] the nature of space,
Which is forever immutable.

2

nam mkha’ nam kha’ zhes ni rab brjod kyang
nam kha’i ngo bo cir yang brub pa med
yod dang med dang yod min med min dang
de las gzhan du’ang mtshan pa’i yul las ‘das

What we call space is rightly named space. However,
The essence of space is contained nowhere.
Whether existent or non-existent, not existent or not non-existent,[245]
It transcends these [concepts] and other objects of the intellect.

3

de ltar nam kha’ sems dang chos nyid la
tha dang chung sad yod pa ma yin te
tha dad ming ni glo bur btags pa tsam
de la don med brjun gyi tshig tu zad

Likewise, in the space-like mind and in the *dharmatā*
Not even the smallest thing exists.
Differentiating names are merely adventitious designations.
They have no meaning; they are like speaking a lie.

4

chos rnam thams cad rang gi sems yin te
sems les ma gtogs chos gzhan rdul tsam med
gang gis gdod nas sems med rtogs pa yis
dus gsum rgyal ba’i dgongs pa dam pa rnyed
chos kyi za ma tog ces yongs su gdags

All phenomena are [your] own mind.
Except for the mind there exists not even an atom of a phenomenon.
Whoever realizes that since the beginning there is no mind
Has discovered the holy understanding of the victorious ones of the three times.
That person is called a "basket of dharma."

5

de yang log pa’i chos gzhan ma yin te
gzod nas lhen cig skes pa’i rang zhin no

---

[243] *dngos* means entity. Literally, the verse says: Entities and non-entities are empty appearance.
[244] *rgyu dang mi rgyu* - alternative translation: caused and non-caused.
[245] Saraha is possibly alluding to the fourfold reasoning (*catuṣkoṭi*) of Nāgārjuna

Moreover, no other erroneous phenomena exist.
Since the very beginning [phenomena] have the coemergent nature.

6

de yi de nyid bstan du yod min te
brjod du med pas sus kyang go ba med
gal te bdag po yod na nor yod de

True reality is taught to be non-existent and
Inexpressible, who does not understand that?
As long as you have [the notion of] a self, that is mistaken understanding.

7

ye nas bdag med de la ci zhig yod
sems yod gyur na chos kun yod rigs te
sems med pa la chos zhig su yis rtogs

Since selflessness is primordial, what else could exist?
If the mind does exist, it is reasonable [to assume that] all phenomena exist.
However, without mind - who could grasp even one atom?[246]

8

sems dang chos su snang ba thams cad ni
bcal na mi rnyed tsol khan gong nas med

Everything that arises as mind and phenomena
Cannot be found when searched for.
[Even] the searcher of the previous [instant] does not exist.

9

med pa dus gsum ma kyes mi ‘gags pas
de nyid gzhan du ‘gyur ba med pa nyid
rang bzhin bde ba chen po’i gnas lugs yin
de phyir snang ba thams cad chos kyi sku

Since non-existence [implies that] in the three times [things are] not born and do not cease,
How could non-existence be transformed into something other than suchness?
[Phenomena’s] mode of being is fundamentally great bliss.
Therefore all appearances are the *dharmakāya*.

10

'gro ba sems can rnam ni sangs rgyas nyid

[246] Alternative translation: who could realize even one dharma?

‘du byed las kun ye nas chos kyi sbyings
btags pa’i chos rnams ri bong ra dang ‘dra[247]

Sentient beings are the buddha himself.
Karmic formations and all karma are since the beginning the *dharmadhatu*
Imputed phenomena are like the horns of a rabbit.

11
kye ma nyi ma sprin bral ‘od zer kun kyab kyang
mig med rnams la mun pa rnams su snang

Alas, [when] the sun [is] without clouds, light rays can pervade everywhere. However,
[for those] without eyes, everything appears as darkness.

12
lhen cig skes pas kun la khyab gyur kyang
rmongs pa bdag la de nyid shin tu ring
‘gro ba rnams kyis sems med ma rtogs pas
btags pa’i sems kyis sems nyid rab tu bcings

Even though co-emergence pervades everything
For the deluded it appears far away.[248]
Sentient beings who do not realize that mind does not exist
get completely trapped in conceptualization.

13
ji ltar gdon gyis brlabs pa’i smyon pa bdag
dbang med don med sdug bsngal byed pa ltar
dngos ‘dzin rnam rtog gdon chen zin pa yi
skye bo don med sdug bsngal ‘ba’ zhig byed

Just as demons inflict madness
They create meaningless, uncontrollable suffering.
Gripped by the great demon of materialism
Beings create nothing but meaningless suffering.

14
kha cig blo yi dbye bas rmongs rnams bcings
bdag po khyim du bzhag nas gzhan du tshol
kha cig gzugs brnyan dag la gdon du ‘dzin
ka cig rtsa ba bor nas lo ‘dab ‘brag
ji ltar bas kyang bslus ba ma tshor ro

[247] The Tibetan should read *ri bong rva* instead of *ri bong ra* in order to make sense.

[248] This verse corresponds approximately to verse 3 of *Song of a King* :
"Even when a home is well lit, blind people still remain in darkness./ Likewise, co-emergence encompasses everything/ and remains close to every individual. Only the ignorant mind moves far away from it."
It is also cited in Tashi Namgyal’s *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams*, 224.

Some are trapped by a [dualistic] discriminating mind.
The proprietor searches elsewhere instead of staying home.[249]
Some take the reflections for a demon.
Some disregard the roots and cut [but] the leaves.
In just the same way [we are] are unaware that we are deceived.[250]

15 - Second Part

kye ho bus pa rnams kyis de nyid ma rig kyang
de nyid ngang las gyos med nga yis rtogs
nga yis nga yir thog mtha' shes gyur bas
nga yis nga mthong rang nyid gcig pur lus
gcig po nyid la bltas pas gcig ma mthong

Hey! Although childish people are unaware of suchness,
In the state of suchness I realized immutability.
Because I came to know the beginning and end of myself.
When I looked into myself I abandoned the self.
I looked into oneness and did not see a single thing.

16

mthong bya mthong byed bral bas brjod du med
brjod du med pa su yis go bar 'gyur
gnyug ma'i yid la gang tshe sbyang gyur ba
de tshe ri khrod nga yi rrtogs par 'jug
seng ge'i 'o ma snod ngan phal bar min

Being free of the seen and the seer, [it] is inexpressible.
Who can understand the inexpressible?
When did the natural mind become purified?
At the moment I entered realization in retreat.
The milk of a lion is not ordinary [even] in a bad vessel.

17

ji ltar nags na seng ge'i nga ro yis
ri dags phra mo thams cad skrag gyur kyang
seng phrug rnams ni dga' bas brgyug pa ltar

Just as the lion's roar in the jungle
That causes terror for all the animals
Brings the lion cubs running with joy,

---

[249] This metaphor might symbolize the mind, which searches for the truth outside of itself. A similar verse can be found in the *People's Dohā/ Treasury of Couplets*, verse 62: "He's in the house, but she asks outside; she sees her husband, but asks the neighbors." Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 89.

[250] The four lines of this verse seem to illustrate the human misapprehension of outer phenomena -- reflections (49), leaves (50) -- which leads them to neglect the crucial search for ultimate truth -- stay home (48), root (50).

18

gdod nas ma skyes bde chen ‘di bstan pas
rmongs pa log rtog can rnams skrag gyur kyang
skal ldan rab tu dga’ bas slu zing byed

When this primordial, unborn bliss is taught,
It terrifies the deluded and confused
But the fortunate ones’ hairs stand on end with delight

19 - Third Part

kye ho yengs sems kyi rang gis rang la ltos
rang gi nyid rang gis rtogs gyur na
yengs pa’i sems kyang phyag gya chen por ‘char
mtshan ma rang grol bde ba chen po’i dang[251]

Kye Ho! With your distracted mind look into yourself!
When you realize your own true nature,
The distracted mind dawns as Mahāmudrā.
Characteristics are self-liberated - great bliss.

20

rmi lam dag gi bde dang sdug bsngal kun
sad pa’i dus na rang bzhin med pa’i phyir
re dang dogs pa’i bsam pas kun blang nas
dgag dang sgrub pa’i bsam pa su zhig byed

Because all happiness and pain in dreams
Are without reality at the moment we wake up.
When you contemplate hope and fear, accepting them [as real],
Who [is it there] to even think about blocking or accomplishing them?

21

‘khor dang mya ngan ‘das pa’i chos rnams kun
de nyid mthong pas rang bzhin med pa’i phyir
re dang dogs pa’i blo ni zad ‘gyur pas
spang dang blang ba’i ‘bad rtsol ci byar yod

Because all phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa,
When examined turn out to have no nature.[252]
Finish with that mind that hopes and fears!
What is the point of exerting yourself in accepting and rejecting?

22

[251] The use of the *‘brel sgra* in *bde ba chen po’i* is mysterious.
[252] Alternative translation: ...have no essence, no self-nature.

snang grags thams cad sgyu ma mig sgyu dang
gzugs brnyan dang mtsungs dngos po mtsan ma med
sgyu mar snang khan sems nyid nam kha'i ste
mtha bral dbus mar sus kyang shes mi 'gyur

All forms and sounds are like illusions, mirages,
And reflections - they are not objects with defining characteristics.
What gives rise to the illusory appearances is mind itself -
Like space, without center and limit. Who should not know it?

23

gang ga' la sogs chu klung sna tsogs pa
btsha can gyi rgya mtshor ro gcig ltar
btags pa'i sems dang sems byung sna tsogs kun
chos kyi dbyings su ro cig shes par byos!

The Ganges and various other rivers
All taste the same in the salty ocean.
The conceptualizing mind and all the various mental events
Have one taste in the *dharmadhatu*. Know it![253]

24

gang zhig nam mkha'i kham ni yongs btsal kyang
mtha' dang dbus med mthong ba yongs su 'gag
de bzhin sems dang chos ni yongs btsal bas
snying po rdul tsam rnyed par ma gyur te

Even if you thoroughly search the realm of outer space,
You will discover neither center nor limits.
In the same way, when you look thoroughly for the mind and phenomena
Not the slightest [trace of a] core of an atom is found.

25

yongs su tshol ba'i sems kyang mi dmigs pas
ci yang ma mthong ba nyid de mthong yin

And because even the thoroughly searching mind cannot be experienced,
When nothing is seen - that is seeing!

26

ji ltar gbrings la 'phur ba'i bya rog ni[254]

[253] In the *Royal Song* Saraha uses the metaphor of rivers and ocean to express the equality of diversity and oneness. Verse 4 reads in Guenther's translation, *Ecstatic Spontaneity*, 151: "Though there may be many rivers, they are one in the sea. Though there may be many lies, one truth will conquer all. When one sun appears, the dark - However deep - will vanish."

[254] *gbrings* must be *gzhings*, meaning ship. The same metaphor appears in the *Body Treasury*, verse 150. It refers to a nautical practice of keeping a crow on board that will help you find land. You release it to see if it comes back or

phyogs rnams bsgor zhing slar yang de ru ‘bab
‘dod pa’i sems kyis bstan pa’i rdzas bcad kyang
dang po’i sems nyid gnyug ma nyid du ‘bab

Just as a crow flies to the ship
Having roamed in all directions, it lands again on the [same] spot,[255]
Even though a mind [full] of desire breaks away from the substantial teachings,
The beginner’s mind settles in the natural state.

27
rkyen gyis mi ‘gul re ba’i yi chad pa
dogs pa’i skugs sa zhigs pas rdo rje sems
rtsa ba chod pa’i sems nyid nam mkha’ ‘dra
sgom du med pas yid la mi bya ste

Circumstances [can] turn unshakable hope into despair.
By destroying [the basis] of fear, the adamantine mind [is achieved.]
Cut the root [of hope and fear] and the authentic mind [will appear] like space!
Don’t meditate, don’t do anything with your mind![256]

28
tha mal shes pa rang lugs gnyug ma la
bcos ma’i dmigs pa dag gis mi bslad de
rang zhin dag pa’i sems la bcos mi dgos
ma bzung ma btang rang dga’ nyid du zhog

Then, in the ordinary mind, the genuine natural state,
You cannot be deceived by fabricated imaginings.[257]
The mind in its pure nature does not need artificiality
Don’t hold on [to anything], don’t reject [anything], rest in the ordinary, joyful state.

29
gal te ma rtogs blo la sgom rgyu med
rtogs pa can la bsgom bya sgom byed med
ji ltar nam mkhas nam mkha dmigs su med
de ltar stong pas stong pa sgom du med

In the unrealized mind there is no cause for meditation,
For the realized one, there is nothing to meditate on, and no one who meditates.
Just like space cannot focus on space,

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else it has found land.

[255] The metaphor of the crow flying from - and returning to - a boat is quoted by Tashi Namgyal in *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams*, and explained further. The crow symbolizes "a passionate mind that pursues the trail of thought [and] returns to the primordial purity of mind." (283). see also *Tantric Treasures,* 93; verse 70.

[256] *yid la mi byed* = not taking to mind, trans, by D. Brown. One of the two key points of Saraha, according to him, the other one being mindfulness without activity.

[257] Alternative translation: *bcos ma’i dmigs:* fabricated objects.

In the same way emptiness cannot meditate on emptiness.

30

gnyis med shes pas chu dang ‘o ma ltar
sna tshogs ro gcig bde chen rgyun chad med
‘di ltar dus gsum rnam pa tham cad du
yid la bya ba med cing ma bral gnyug ma’i ngang

Like milk and water [when mixed together], awareness is nondual.
Variety has one taste: that of uninterrupted great bliss.
In this same way in every moment of the three times
Mental activity does not exist and [it is] not separate [from] innate nature.

31

de nyid skyong la sgom zhes tha snyad gdags
rlung ni mi bzung yid ni mi bcing bar
ma bcos shes pa bu chung lta bur zhog

The meditation known as "protecting suchness" is a verbal designation.
Without holding subtle energy [*lung*/*prāṇa*] and without controlling your mind,
Rest in unfabricated awareness, like a little child!

32

dran rtog byung na de nyid rang la ltos
chu dang rlabs gnyis tha dad ma rtogs shig
yid la mi byed phyag gya chen po la
sgom rgyu rdul tsam med pas mi sgom ste

When memories or thoughts arise, look [directly] into their essence![258]
Realize water and waves as not being two [different things]!
In Mahāmudrā there is nothing to do with the mind.
There is not one iota of meditation to do. Therefore don’t meditate!

33

sgom med don pa ‘bral med sgom pa’i mchog
gnyis med lhan cig bde ba chen po’i ro

The highest meditation is inseparable from appearances and free of meditation.[259]
That is the taste of great bliss of non-dual co-emergence.

34

ji ltar chu la chu gshag ro gcig ltar
ji bzhin ngang du de bzhin gnas pa’i tshe

[258] Alternative translation: When ordinary thoughts arise, see them as suchness.

[259] Alternative translation: Non-meditation and expression "emission" (don pa), [practiced] inseparably, is the highest meditation.

dmigs ‘dzin zhen pa’i yid ni rab tu zhi

Just as water poured into water is of one taste,
So when abiding in that state,
The mind’s object-grasping and -clinging dissolves completely.[260]

35 - Fourth Part
kye ho gnis med gnyug ma'i rnal 'byor gang de la
spang dang blang ba’i dgnos po ci zhig yod
ngas ni chos kun ma btang bas
bu khyod 'di gyis bya ba mi smra'o

Hey! In the *yoga* of natural non-duality,
What thing is there to abandon or to adopt?
Because I don’t abandon any phenomena,
You, [my] child, follow this and do not speak of things to do!

36
ji ltar nor bu de dngos med pa ltar
rnal 'byor spyod pa de dngos med pa ste
‘du byed sna tshogs cal col gang smras kyang
rnal ‘byor blo ni gcig las mi ‘da’o

Just like this jewel is inauthentic,
Just so those practitioners of *yoga* are fakes.[261]
Speaking of various karmic formations is empty talk.
The *yoga* mind will not go beyond oneness.

37
gcig nyid na ni gcig kyang yod min pas
rnam pa sna tshogs rtsa ba bral gyur te
smyon pa bzhin du rtsis med yan pa la
byar med spyod pa bu chung bzhin du nas

When there is oneness, even the *one* does not exist.
The manifold appearances are without basis.
Be free, like a madman without regard [for anything.]
Live effortlessly like a small child.

38 - Fifth Part
e ma srid pa’i ‘dam skyes padma lta bu’i sems
nyes pa gang gi gang la gos pa med

How wonderful! Growing from the mud of samsaric existence, the mind is like a lotus

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[260] *rab tu zhi*: alternative translation: completely pacified.
[261] *rnal ‘byor spyod pa* = yogacārin. Alternative trans.: Just so the yogacārins are inauthentic.

Not sullied by any fault whatsoever wherever.

39

za zhing ‘thung la gnyis spros bde ba dang
gal te lus sems rab tu gdungs gyur dang
rnam pa sna tshog gang la spyod gyur pa
gang gis ma bcings ma grol gos pa med

Whether enjoying the thought of food and drink,
Or tormented by extreme pain in body or mind,
Whatever manifold appearances are experienced,
By them [the mind] is not bound, not liberated, not affected.

40

rtogs pa’i rang spyod rtsis med dang de nas
rmongs pa’i ‘gro ba nyam thag mngon gyur tshe
mi bzod snying rje’i shugs kyis mchi ma ‘byung
bdag gzhan bzlog nas phan pa nyid la ‘jug

Having no regard for the very experience of realization,
When you see wretched beings of ignorance
Tears will well up because of the force of unbearable compassion.
By exchanging self with other, goodness is caused.

41

don la brtags na dmigs pa gsum bral bas
yang dag ma yin rmi lam sgyu ‘dra ste

If you examine the meaning while being free of the three conceptualizations,
[You will see that] it is erroneous, like an illusion or a dream.

42

chags thogs bral bas dka’ zhing skye med pa
sgyu ma mkhas pa sgyu ma’i don byed mtshungs
gdod nas dag pa nam makha'i rang bzhin la
spangs dang thob pa’i dngos po ‘ga’ yang med

When you are free from the obstacle of attachment,
Difficulties will not arise.
It is similar to the magician who understands the meaning of the illusion.
In the nature of originally pure space
There is nothing whatsoever to reject or to attain.

43

yid la byar med phyag rgya chen po ni
‘bras bu gang du’ang re bama byed cig

re ba'i sems ni gdod nas ma skyes pas
spangs dang thob pa'i dgnos po ci zhig yod

Mahāmudrā is the mind free of objects.
Do not have any hope for [attaining] the fruit!
Since this hoping mind is since the beginning unborn -
What thing is there to abandon or to obtain?

44

gal te gang gis thob pa'i gnos po ci zhig yod
gal te gang gis thob pa'i dngos yod na[262]
bstan pa'i phag rgya rnam bzhis ci zhig byed

If you should ask: Does attainment exist [as a thing]?
If attainment did really exist,
For what purpose were the four seals taught?

45

ji ltar ri dags 'khrul pas gdungs pa yis
smig rgyu'i chu la rab tu brgyug pa ltar
rmongs pa gang zhig 'dod pas rab gdungs pas
ji ltar 'bad kyang slar ni ring bar 'gyur

Just as deer overwhelmed by delusion
Hurries towards a mirage of water
Ignorant fools overwhelmed by desire
Even exerting themselves, remain far away [from the goal].[263]

46

ye nas ma skyes rang bzhin rnam dag pas
de las khyad par cung zad yod min te
btags pa'i yid ni dbyings su dag gyur pa
de la rdo rje 'chang zhes btags pa tsam

Since the unborn nature is primordially completely pure,
Therein not the slightest distinction exists.
The conceptualizing intellect is purified in the sphere of reality.[264]
To call this *Dorje Chang* is nothing more than tagging a label.

47

ji ltar e than skam po'i smig rgyu dag
chur snang chu ni gnyis su med pa lthar
bzod nas dag pa btags pa'i yid sangs pa

[262] The verses 158 and 159 look like alternate versions of the same verse.
[263] Alternate translation: Despite [their] efforts remain far away [from the goal].
[264] *dbyings* = the *dharmadhātu*, translated here as the sphere of reality.

de la rtag chad gnyis su brjod du med

Just as [in] the mirages of a dry plain
Illusory water seems to be [real] water - they are not two.
Just so, the conceptualizing intellect has been pure since the very beginning.
That is to say, eternalism, nihilism, and duality are inexpressible.

48 - Final Wishing Prayer

yid bzhin nor bu dpag bsam shing bzhin du
smon lam dbang gis re ba yongs skong ba
[175] de yang 'jig rten tha snyad kun rzob ste
dam pa'i don du 'ga' yang don ma yin

Equal to a wish-fulfilling jewel and a wish-fulfilling tree,
May the power of wishing prayers fulfill all hopes completely.
This being said, worldly conventions are conventional,
And the ultimate has no meaning whatsoever.

Colophon

do ha mdzod ces bya ba phyag rgya chen po'i man ngag dpal ri krod pa chen po sa ra ha'i zhal snga nas mdzad pa rdzogs so
rgya gar gyi mkhan po shr'i bee ro tsa na rakshitas rang 'gyur du mdzad pao

This was the perfectly spoken Treasury of Couplets of Mahāmudrā Oral Instructions by the magnificent great hermit Saraha.
It was translated by the Indian scholar Khenpo Śri Vairocana Rakśita himself.

Chapter Three

3. Saraha's Traces in the Kagyü Mahāmudrā Literature

Mahāmudrā meditation is generally taught from a meditation manual to audiences of students. This more public form of teaching, established at the time of Gampopa's reforms in the twelfth century, replaced the private transmission style "from master to disciple" of the early days. As seen in the second chapter, the Karma Kagyü School uses to this day two large meditation manuals for a comprehensive transmission of the subject. One is *Mahāmudrā, The Ocean of Definite Meaning* (*phyag chen nges don rgya mtso*), by the ninth Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje (*dbang phyug rdo rje,* 1556-1603), an influential secular and religious leader in East Tibet who is considered the ninth reincarnation of the head of the Karma Kagyü School. The other work is the *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams* (*phyag chen zla ba'i 'od zer*) by Tagpo Tashi Namgyal (*bkra shis rnam rgyal,* 1512-1687), which has been translated under the title *Mahāmudrā, The Quintessence of Mind and Mahāmudrā*. Tashi Namgyal is an outstanding Drugpa Kagyü scholar, who also trained in the Sakya tradition and eventually became the senior abbot of Daglha Gampo (*dvags lha sgam po dgon pa*) in Southern Tibet.

Both works make extensive use of quotations to lend authority to their expositions. Among hundreds of quotes, Saraha is quoted six times by Wangchuk Dorje, and about seventy times by Tashi Namgyal.[265]

These two meditation manuals are, unlike Saraha's songs, highly structured works, which explain a gradual development of the mahāmudrā path. As they lay out the meditation training from the very first preparatory exercises until the final mahāmudrā level, they necessarily include (in the beginning stages) the very meditation techniques that Saraha ridicules or denigrates in his

[265] The Index of "Kagyur and Tengyur Quotations" by the translator mentions Saraha 16 times among c.480 quotations. The text has however about 70 quotes, depending on the way of counting quotes that consist of several parts.

teachings. In the first two chapters, Saraha appears as an eccentric and charismatic teacher, who through the power of his spiritual realization becomes authoritative for the mahāmudrā tradition. To integrate this wild man into tradition, some of his rough edges had to be smoothed down. The manner in which his teachings are quoted -- or not quoted -- in the two before-mentioned meditation manuals can be considered a kind of "smoothing the edges."

The previous chapter discussed the dominant features of Saraha's poetry, namely (1) his focus on the ultimate; (2) his promotion of minimal-intervention meditation, combined with a biting critique of formal, "fabricated" meditation; and (3) his emphasis of guru devotion. In addition, his teachings came in a particular pedagogic style (4): To express the ultimate, Saraha used pictoral, emotional and cognitive elements. When criticizing or giving pointing-out instructions, his language contained paradox, provocative expressions, and rhetorical questions.

The quotations in the manuals reflect these four features only partially. Especially the first work, *Ocean of Definite Meaning*, with its six short verses, cannot do justice to the complete work of Saraha. The *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams* obviously covers a lot more of Saraha's teaching by the sheer number of quotations it offers. Still, by integrating Saraha into an orderly gradual path, the reader acquires a different impression than Saraha's songs convey.

Both manuals reflect Saraha's concern with the ultimate and the corresponding approach to meditation. They portray his emphasis on relaxation,[266] on the experience of one-taste[267] and great bliss,[268] and on non-meditation, or the dimension beyond-the-intellect.[269] In Saraha's songs, he approached the unfathomable ultimate with an abundance of similes. These are reflected to a

[266] See quotations #3.1.2./3./5.and #3.2.9./10./14./34./35./36.
[267] See for example quotation #3.1.4. and #3.2.12./69.
[268] See #3.2.15./25./58. and 61.
[269] See #3.1.6.and 3.2.1.

great extent in the quotations chosen by Tashi Namgyal, and also in two quotes given by Wangchuk Dorje.[270]

In a few instances, Saraha comments on aspects of formal practice, such as the control of subtle energies[271] and the positioning of the meditator's gaze.[272] It has been noted, however, in the two previous chapters that Saraha's position towards such yogic practices seems ambiguous: at times he criticizes them, at others he promotes them. This is, therefore, a clear example of the smoothing of the rough edges presented by Saraha's work.

Only Tashi Namgyal's meditation manual quotes Saraha briefly on guru devotion. And as far as Saraha's various criticisms and ironic style is concerned, it appears attenuated in the two books. There are no critical remarks of non-Buddhist practitioners. The criticisms of Buddhist practice look more like warnings to not deviate from correct practice. We do not find any of Saraha's provocative exclamations like "you fool" or "you hick," and only few of his typical rhetorical questions.

The majority of quotations seem to address advanced meditation stages, corresponding to the third or fourth mahāmudrā level. This is in perfect alignment with the songs. In *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams,* Tashi Namgyal gives an explanation that attempts to harmonize two seemingly contradictory meditation approaches.[273] He thereby manages to define Saraha's place in the general mahāmudrā system. Tashi Namgyal explains that there is "the rapid path which is designed for a person with superb intellect, well disposed to instantaneous illumination. [...] [And] there is the gradual path, which is for a person of an average or inferior intellect disposed toward gradual illumination."[274] He goes on to explain that the path of instantaneous illumination

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[270] For example #3.1.4.and #3.2.12./19./20./22.
[271] See #3.1.1.
[272] See #3.2.7.
[273] Namgyal, *Mahmudra,* 143-145.
[274] Namgyal, *Mahāmudrā ,* 143.

consists of two steps. At first, the guru introduces the adept to the correct vision of ultimate reality, thereby clearing confusion and doubts in the adept's mind. Secondly, the adept settles the mind in a non-dual state. Tashi Namgyal enumerates a number of *mahāsiddhas,* including Saraha, Śavari and Tilopa, as proponents of this approach and repeats several times that this path is for "highly intelligent and passionate persons" of "superb intellect."[275]

The gradual path, on the other hand, consists of three steps. The adept has to master first tranquility (*zhi gnas*),[276] then insight (*lhag mthong*), and thirdly attain the realization of "Thatness [of true reality]."[277] Tashi Namgyal refers here to the systems of sūtra mahāmudrā and essence mahāmudrā--without, however, mentioning these terms. He explains that the Kagyü tradition has integrated both approaches, but concludes that he will elucidate in his opus the gradual path "because it is widely known in the country."[278] With this explanation, Tashi Namgyal confirms Saraha as a great authority for the path of instantaneous illumination without diminishing the value, and even necessity, of the gradual path. With these words, he offers Saraha the praise of being a teacher for the elite-meditator. The meditation techniques that Saraha criticizes are "rescued" for the crowd of common practitioners.

The following section is an annotated inventory of Saraha's quotations in the two manuals mentioned. Both texts will be briefly introduced. The quotes will then be contextualized and listed in the order they appear in the manuals. Where it is known, the source of the quote will be provided. The Tibetan originals, however, seldom offer this information. Due to this, as well as variations in editions and translations, an exhaustive analysis has yet to be produced.

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[275] Ibid., 143 &144.
[276] Lhalungpa translates *zhi gnas* as tranquility throughout his book. To make reading easier, I will use the same word - instead of calm abiding - in this chapter.
[277] Namgyal. *Mahāmudrā*, 144.
[278] Ibid.

3.1. Quotations in *Mahāmudrā, The Ocean of Definite Meaning*

Mahāmudrā, The Profound Instructions on Connate Union: The Radiant Activity of the Essence of the Ocean of Definitive Meaning[279] is the complete title of the meditation manual by the ninth Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje. This text is the most extensive of three renowned mahāmudrā texts by the same author.[280] It is divided into four parts: (1) The Preliminary Practices; (2) The Actual Practice, (3) Concluding Topics, and (4) Supplementary Topics.

The preliminary practices consist of four so-called common, and four extraordinary preliminaries. These are conceptual exercises that are geared towards rendering the mind supple enough to start the actual meditation. Part Two presents the two classic stages of meditation: calm abiding or tranquility (*śamatha, zhi gnas*) and superior insight (*vipaśyanā, lhag mthong*) and ends with pointing-out instructions on the nature of mind. In Part Three, the author discusses the remediation of mistakes and hindrances that occur during meditation training, and he describes the four levels (or *yogas*) of mahāmudrā. The last part is rather short and gives some theoretical background on the mahāmudrā system.

The work is written for meditation teachers as a guide for instructing students on the path. Theoretical chapters alternate with practical meditation-training sessions. Sections with hypothetical questions and answers show how meditation instructors and their disciples have to entertain a constructive dialogue during the training to guarantee a successful outcome. In general, the *Ocean of Definitive Meaning* is a text concerned with the actual practical application of mahāmudrā; theoretical discussions are kept to a minimum.

3.1.1. The first occasion on which Saraha is quoted is in Part Two on "The Actual Practice." In the chapter explaining the key points of the physical posture, Karmapa Wangchuk

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[279] In Tibetan: *lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi zab khrid nges don rgya mtsho'i snying po phrin las 'od 'phro*.
[280] See Chapter One.

Dorje underlines the importance of a correct meditation posture by giving a yogic explanation of the interconnectedness of body, subtle energies (*prāṇa, rlung*), and mind. He refers to two approaches of mastery, which he attributes to the Great Brahmin Saraha and Nāropa. The two techniques are:

> (1) mind controlling the prāṇas (*sems kyis rlung zin pa*) and
> (2) the prāṇas controlling mind (*rlung gis sems zin pa*). (3.1.1.)[281]

The first approach is described as simply resting the mind; the second approach involves visualization and breath-control techniques. As mentioned before, Saraha himself sometimes ridiculed these very methods.

3.1.2.-3. After the explanation of the physical aspect of meditation training follows the more important exposition of the key points for the mind. Before getting into the technical details, the author gives a taste of the "way to rest the mind"[282] by citing a number of famous Tibetan and Indian mahāmudrā masters (such as Gampopa, Dombi Heruka, Götsangpa, Master Shang, Tilopa and Siddha Orgyenpa). Saraha is quoted with a verse form the *People's Dohā*:

> If let loose, it rests firmly without moving. I have realized that (to do) the reverse would be like a camel. (3.1.2)[283]

> If the mind-itself that is twisted into knots
> Is loosened, it is undoubtedly liberated. (3.1.3.)[284]

This quote expresses the for Saraha typical "soft" -- or even passive -- meditation techniques. The practitioner is advised to create conditions that allow meditation to happen, rather than to "create" meditation. The reference to the camel is explained by a contemporary Tibetan teacher[285] as follows. A mother camel gets restless when tethered. If however she is let

[281] Wangchuk Dorje, *Mahāmudrā Ocean,* 95.
[282] Ibid., 100
[283] Ibid., 108. Source: *People's Dohā*, verse 43. (Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 78. Guenther, *Ecstatic Spontaneity,* 100.)
[284] Ibid.,109. Source: *People's Dohā*, verse 42 h. (Jackson, ibid., 78, Guenther, *ibid.,* 99.)
[285] Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso, in Wangchuk Dorje, *Mahāmudrā Ocean,* 108.

loose and only her young is tethered, the mother camel will not leave. In the same way, Saraha believes that the mind settles down when it is not restraint by techniques and efforts.

The verse on loosening the mind is also quoted twice in the second meditation manual, the *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams*. For meditators of the Kagyü tradition, it can therefore be considered a classic.

3.1.4. As to be expected, Saraha is not mentioned in the section of calm-abiding meditation techniques. The following section on superior insight gives instructions on the correct manner to investigate the mind, followed by a series of pointing-out instructions. This type of instruction corresponds to the first step of the path to instantaneous illumination, as Tashi Namgyal explains it. Saraha is therefore a foremost authority to quote. In the chapter "Pointing Out (the Nature of Mind) by Means of Determining Awareness-Emptiness"[286] he expresses his understanding of a mind in the state of one-taste, where attraction and repulsion do not operate any longer, because the mind is at rest:

> Rest in reflexive clarity itself, (as illustrated by) water and candle flames.
> I do not take up or reject (whatever) may come or go. (3.1.4.)[287]

3.1.5. Also, the next quote tells meditators to be relaxed and to leave the mind naturally at rest. Saraha states that realization is an intrinsic part of the mind and points out the mistake of "searching elsewhere." This is one of the recurrent themes in his songs. The following quote is part of the last chapter on superior insight, in which mahāmudrā masters are quoted who point out the "ultimate, unmistaken abiding nature"[288] of mind:

> Mind is the root of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.
> Realizing this, rest loosely without meditating.
> To leave aside your own (nature) and search elsewhere is extremely deluded.

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[286] Ibid., 144.
[287] Ibid., 145. The editors attribute this verse to the *People's Dohā,* verse 101. It can be found in Guenther's translation, *Ecstatic Spontaneity* , 112, but not in Jackson's translation (*Tantric Treasures*).
[288] Wangchuk Dorje, *Mahāmudrā Ocean,* 173.

> It is neither something nor is it not-something: everything is within the intrinsic state. (3.1.5.)[289]

3.1.6. In Part Four, the short section on "Supplementary Topics," Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje clarifies mahāmudrā terminology, such as the ground-path-fruition system, or the term mahāmudrā itself. Part Four opens with a chapter called "Identifying the Essence," in which ultimate mahāmudrā is explained to be essentially the same as the result of the *prajṇāparamitā*-path, as well as the result of the *madhyamaka*-path or the *dzogchen*-path (in Sanskrit *mahāsandhi*). Saraha's words appear within a quote by Gyalwa Yang Gönpa (*rgyal ba yang dgon pa,* 1213-1258),[290] where he describes mahāmudrā as being beyond definitions:

> It is free from the three conditions, beyond the four joys, and is more special than luminosity. (3.1.6.)[291]

According to Gyalwa Yang Gönpa, the three conditions mentioned by Saraha are the three experiences of the calm abiding meditation (*śamatha, zhi gnas*), namely bliss, clarity, and non-thought. The four joys were explained in the first chapter as stages of increasingly subtle realization. The third technical term Saraha uses, luminosity, is a translation for *'od gsal*, the most subtle mind that realizes emptiness. All three terms refer to the highest realizations on the path, certainly desired by all practitioners. Yet, Saraha points beyond them. This last quote is a very typical example for his focus on the realization of ultimate reality.

3.2. Saraha-Quotes in Tashi Namgyal's *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams*

"*Moonlight: An Excellent Elucidation of the Meditational Stages of the Ultimate Great Seal*"[292] is the complete title of this meditation manual, written by the sixteenth century Kagyü scholar Tashi Namgyal, who also studied extensively with the Sakya order.[293] This work has a

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[289] Ibid., 174.
[290] Gyalwa Yang Gonpa was a student of Götsangpa and master in the Drukpa Kagyü tradition.
[291] Wangchuk Dorje, *Mahāmudrā Ocean*, 254.
[292] The title in Tibetan: *nges don phyag rgya chen po'i sgom rim gsal bar byed pa legs bshad zla ba'i 'od zer*
[293] Namgyal, *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams,* xxi.

more scholarly presentation of the mahāmudrā path than Wangchuk Dorje's manual, and it includes doctrinal discussions between controversial schools. The author divides his presentation in two books. The first book treats the "common system" of the meditation of tranquility and superior insight according to the Hīnayāna and Mahāyana teachings.[294] Book Two, which is about four times the size of the first book, is an exposition of the "uncommon meditation" of mahāmudrā. It describes the preliminary practices; tranquility- and insight-meditation; the stages of the path; and the integration of realization into daily life, called post-meditation. It concludes with an elucidation of the four yogas of mahāmudrā. Unlike Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje's manual, which is solely concerned with meditation instructions of *one* particular school -- the Karma Kagyü School -- Tashi Namgyal discusses the subject more broadly. He describes various existing viewpoints on meditation, and discards or endorses them according to his understanding of the matter.

The translator of the *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams,* Lobsang Lhalungpa, provides an index of some of the sources of the quotations used by Tashi Namgyal. He lists about 480 quotes of Mahāmudrā masters, sūtras, śastras or tantras. Sixteen of these refer to Saraha. Upon a closer examination of the text, however, we find nearly seventy quotations by Saraha. To trace the sources of the quotations, Lhalungpa works with different editions of the Tibetan canons as references. Among these are the Peking and Delhi Editions.[295] He did not consult the Derge Edition at all. A critical comparison of these different editions, as well as further research on the sources for Saraha's quotation, would be a worthwhile project for the future.

3.2.1. The first book of the *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams* presents the so-called common system of tranquility and insight meditation. It is not surprising that there are no quotations by

[294] Even though the terminology "Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna" is somewhat problematic, they were used by the translator Lobsang Lhalungpa; therefore I adopted them for this passage of my paper.
[295] Index of Quotations: Namgyal. *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams,* 475-488. Abbriviations used: TPE for Tengyur Peking Edition, DE for Delhi Edition.

Saraha. Yet, in the very last chapter of Book One, Tashi Namgyal reports a discussion about the validity of the meditation method called "settling the mind into a non-conceptual state."[296] Is it a state similar to deep sleep or a state of clinging to emptiness? Or else, is it a promising training in the essential vision of reality? Tashi Namgyal's opponents maintain that non-conceptual meditation is merely tranquility training, because insight-meditation has to be analytical, and therefore conceptual. The details of this discussion are very complex. Here it suffices to say that the author quotes Saraha in support of his view that non-conceptual meditation is the only meditation with which practitioners are able to realize ultimate reality:

> The true essence of reality is unblemished
> By the extreme concepts and impurities (prejudices);
> Pure from the beginning, it is beyond determination;
> To discriminate it is to arouse a poisonous snake. (3.2.1)[297]

Any kind of investigation is the product of a conditioned mind, and is "indulging in conceptual duality,"[298] says Tashi Namgyal. He again quotes Saraha, who evokes another strong metaphor to express his repudiation of discursive mental activity:

> When the mind is enchanted (by the senses)
> And indulges in them with a passionate heart,
> Then even a pain as small as the husk of a sesame seed
> Is sure to cause constant affliction. (3.2.2)[299]

These quotes are found in the chapter "Elimination of Doubts about the Essential Vision of Reality."[300]

3.2.3.-6. Book Two opens with a clarification of the various systems of sūtra-, tantra- and essence-mahāmudrā.[301] In fact a highly detailed discussion, it was summarized and simplified in

[296] Namgyal, *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams,* 79.
[297] Ibid., 82, from Tengyur Peking Edition (TPE), V. TSI,F.34,1.6
[298] Ibid., 81-82.
[299] Ibid., 83, from Delhi Edition, V. NGA,F.9,1.3.
[300] Ibid., 77-88.
[301] Chapter One: "Exposition Engendering Confidence," 91-119.

the Introduction to Mahāmudrā[302] of this text. The title of the chapter expresses the overall intent of the author: "How Mahāmudrā embodies the Deep Meaning of All the Sūtras and Tantras."[303] Tashi Namgyal presents Saraha as the proponent of the essential path and quotes him with a series of four statements:

> This supreme, essential path of the Great Vehicle
> Enables one to bring into actuality the accomplishment.
> [This is possible] because the accomplishment
> Has been inherent [as the seed] from primordial times on. (3.2.3.)[304]
>
> It is empty of any mystic circle [of transcending awareness]
> And empty of devotees who make burning offerings.
> Detached from any mystical formula, gesture, and consecration,
> It cannot be realized through tantras and śastras.
> This indestructible awareness is of perfect beauty
> In its natural realm. (3.2.4.)[305]
>
> It does not need either tantra or mantra, examination or contemplation
> For they cause delusion in the mind. (3.2.5.)[306]
>
> What do you need any butter lamps or cakes of grain for?
> What does one do with it and why does one apply the innermost mystical formula? (3.2.6.)[307]

This last verse is known to the reader from the previous chapter. Tashi Namgyal uses these quotes to show that mahāmudrā is independent from, if not superior to, tantric mysticism. Without naming the source directly, he gives another quote, which we have seen already in Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje's opus: "Mahāmudrā is regarded as being detached from the three subtle cognitions, while transcending the four kinds of joy and even surpassing the mind's innate transparency."[308] Despite statements like these, Saraha's work is interspersed with references to

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[302] Chapter One, (1.2.3.) of this text.
[303] Namgyal, *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams*, 109.
[304] Ibid., 110.
[305] Ibid.
[306] Ibid., 111.
[307] Ibid., Compare this verse with: *Treasury of Couplets /People's Dohā*, verse 14, Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 60. Mystical formula refers to mantra.
[308] Ibid.,111. See quote # 3.1.6.

tantric practice. Tashi Namgyal points to this dilemma, by referring to the *Queen's Dohā*, in which Saraha taught tantric practices such as the union with a female consort as a means to spiritual perfection. He concludes that one can practice mahāmudrā independently or in conjunction with tantric practice. Both ways are valid.

In the same chapter, the author collects quotations that show how mahāmudrā with its focus on "thatness or the intrinsic reality of all things" (*de kho na nyid*)[309] encompasses all other kinds of practice:

> That nonconceptual awareness is reading, comprehending, and meditating as well as cherishing the dharma. (3.2.7.)[310]

This verse states that all other spiritual practices are accomplished with the meditation on empty awareness alone. Saraha's statement is more easily understood in context of another quote in the same passage, which says:

> If one does not move away from the awareness of void
> One has combined the six principles of perfection (*paramitā*).[311]

3.2.8. The chapter goes on to explain how very useless all spiritual practices are, if they lack the nonconceptual awareness of reality. Saraha's *People's Dohā* serves again as a useful source. Tashi Namgyal cites the following tirade of criticisms against deviated spiritual activities:

> Having thus renounced the world, these devout celibates
> Are designated to be full-fledged monks, elders, and novices.
> Some teach the sūtras
> Some grasp the single flavor of the mind's nature,
> While others apply the Mahāyāna teachings as the cause (of liberation).
> These teachings originate from the classical treatises on the conceptual marks (of realities).
> Still others meditate on the sublime cosmic dimension and the divine assembly (maṇḍala).

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309 Ibid., 112.
310 Ibid., source: DE, V.NGA, F.512,1-7.
311 *Vajrasamādhi Sūtra*, Ibid., 113.

Some elucidate the significance of the fourth empowerment;
Others contemplate the element of space;
Still others view the void.
Most have embarked upon the path of disharmony (leading in an unfavorable direction).
Whoever contemplates the nature of nirvāṇa
Without spontaneous awareness
Will not realize not realize the ultimate. (3.2.8.)[312]

3.2.9.-11. Tashi Namgyal's instructions on the actual mahāmudrā practice begin with Chapter Three on tranquility meditation.[313] In a more advanced section on "Formless Tranquility, Without a Mental Image," he discusses the role of exertion and relaxation in meditation. According to him, the great danger of tranquility meditation is the loss of mindfulness and focus, which leads to a dull inertia in the mind. He quotes Saraha's classic verse in favor of total relaxation:

By releasing the tension that binds the mind,
One undoubtedly brings about inner freedom. (3.2.9.)[314]

A mind in bondage tries to run in ten different directions;

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[312] Namgyal, *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams,* 115. Delhi Edition (DE), NGA. F 40B, 1-7. Compare this translation to Jackson's translation of verses 10-13 of the *People's Dohā/Treasury of Couplets*, 57-59. Jackson's translation has a tone of irony and mockery that is missing in Lhalungpa's translation.

Self-proclaimed novices, monks and elders,
These dress-up friars and ascetics!
Some sit writing comments on the sūtras,
Others seek to dry up intellect.
Others run around in the Great Way,
Where scripture turns to sophistery and word play.
Some contemplate the maṇḍala circle, others describe the Fourth as real.
Some think it's in the realm of space,
Others connect it with emptiness:
Mostly, they dwell in contradicition.
You may give up the innate and fancy nirvāṇa,
But not an ounce of the ultimate will you gain

[313] Namgyal, *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams* , Chapter Three: "Guiding Meditators on the Path: Tranquility," 146-174. Chapter Two, "Preparatory Practices," does not have a quote by Saraha.

[314] Ibid., 162. Source:DE,V. NGA,F.71,1.3 For comparison Jackson's translation: *Treasures,* 78. verse 42h:

This mind/ so tightly bound - relax it, and you're free, no doubt;
the things that bind the deluded are freedom for the wise.
Bound, it runs/ in all directions,/ freed, it stands there motionless;/
look at the camel, friend:/ the paradox/ is clear to me.

In Guenther's rendition of the People's Dohā, it corresponds to verses 45-46, *Ecstatic Spontaneity,* 99-100.

If released it settles firmly and immutably.
Reversing that (mind), (one) will be like a (restless) camel - so I understand. (3.2.10.)[315]

This verse from the *People's Dohā* was also quoted by Karmapa Wangchuk Dorje in the *Ocean of Definitive Meaning*. And a similar verse is quoted again by Tashi Namgyal further along in his explanations (quotations #14, 35, and 36 in this section). In the mind of a practitioner of the Tibetan Kagyü School, one can well imagine how the person of Saraha became linked inseparably to the meditation of natural release. The next line confirms this once more:

Any form of attachment should be released. (3.2.11.)[316]

3.2.12.-13. This instruction can be understood as a further example of Saraha's style of dealing with the deeper causes of meditation rather than with more superficial techniques. Traditionally, tranquility meditation is presented as, first and foremost, training the mind by focusing on various objects.[317] The most common techniques for focusing the mind are the concentration on the breath; counting the breathing cycles; or the concentration on a visual object, either on a material object placed in front of the meditator, or on a visualized object. Mediators may discipline the mind with these techniques, or they can develop a deeper understanding of the human condition. The latter approach aims at the reduction of attachments, as these are seen as the deeper reasons for the restlessness of the mind. Once the fascination with the world is reduced, the mind naturally is less inclined to engage in discursive activity. Also a deeper understanding of emptiness, which is inherent to all phenomena and gives them their "equal taste," has the power to quiet the mind. Tashi Namgyal quotes the "*Dohā*" with a verse that identifies Saraha as its author:

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[315] Ibid., 163. On the metaphor of the camel see #3.1.2.-3 of this chapter.
[316] Ibid. Compare to the last quote, # 3.2.73.
[317] Ibid, 149-157.

By attaining a spacelike quietude
One's psychic energies will be harnessed.
By comprehending the equality of all things
One's mind will be pacified, unmoved by distraction. By realizing the mind power
One will hasten liberation from all that is transient and fluid.
So proclaims the Archer [Saraha]. (3.2.12.)[318]

"The *Dohā*" is quoted again in the same section, telling the reader:

Whenever someone has quieted the mind in an undistracted state
Then he will gain liberation from the conditions of saṃsāra. (3.2.13.)[319]

Meditation manuals, such as the two examined in this chapter, teach a combination of both approaches: form- and formless practices. Saraha, however, is quoted exclusively for the second approach. He points out that meditators who try to restrain or discipline (bind) their mind experience agitation as a result. Binding the mind includes for him all kinds of artificiality and interference, even a meditation technique. Instead, he advises that attachments have to be released. The vocabulary he uses, *releasing* instead of *cutting* attachments, thoughts, etc., express his soft, non-forceful, natural approach.

3.2.14.-15. In the following Chapter Four on insight meditation,[320] we read Saraha quoted with what seems to be yet another version of the most quoted verse of the *People's Dohā*:[321]

If one binds the mind, it will be overpowered by bondage.
If released, it will be free from doubt. (3.2.14.)

Tashi Namgyal says: "All realities are generally shown to be mind-made."[322] Therefore, meditation on the mind is the solution to all the problems of saṃsāra. He quotes from the same *dohā*, verse 124:[323]

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[318] Ibid., 158. DE, V. NGA, F 6.1.4.
[319] Ibid.
[320] Ibid., Chapter Four: "Guiding Meditators on the Path: Insight," 175 - 212.
[321] *People's Dohā,* verse 42/45h. See notes to # 3.1.3.
[322] Ibid., 179.
[323] According to Guenther, *Ecstatic Spontaneity*, 117.

Oh, if only the ignorant beings would direct the mind toward an inward examination,
They would achieve liberation from all erroneous views.
If they would settle perfectly in that state
Through the power of great bliss,
They would gain sacred realization. (3.2.15.)[324]

3.2.16.-17. Tashi Namgyal then goes on to explain how insight meditation is actually put into practice. He states that the "analyses of mind through discerning wisdom" has to be the central theme of insight meditation. In the section "The Actual Stages of Insight Meditation," he begins again with the physical aspects of meditation. Saraha's words are taken to explain the positioning of the eyes' gaze:

In seeking pure awareness beyond meditation,
It is also said, "Meditating with open eyes
Surpasses all other meditational methods."(3.2.16.)

Meditators of the brahmanic order look upward,
Calm śravakas look downward,
While (mystics) gaze straight ahead with "vajra eyes."(3.2.17.)[325]

3.2.18. The section continues with a detailed description of the stages of insight meditation. Tashi Namgyal explains how a practitioner, when trying to examine the clarity—or emptiness—aspect of the mind, will "find himself at an utter loss,[326] unable to describe what he or she experiences. This leads to "a kind of complete inward cognition,"[327] which requires a vivid mindfulness in order to lead to a successful result. Saraha comments on the importance of non-distraction:

O, you should look inwardly for the sign of intrinsic reality.
By failing to watch your mind attentively
And thereby getting distracted,
You will not see the very intrinsic nature of the mind! (3.2.18.)[328]

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324 Ibid., 180. DE,V. NGA, F. 6B, 1-3.
325 Namgyal, 184. Note on p. 449 explains vajra eyes as penetrating insight into the union of bliss and emptiness. Source TPE,V. TSI,F. 36, 1.3
326 Namgyal, 185.
327 Ibid.
328 Ibid., 186. TPE (T), V. TSI, F. 34b 1.6.

3.2.19.-20. Mahāmudrā masters use similes and metaphors to talk about the unfathomable mind.[329] Saraha's poetry plays with the multivalence of symbolic expressions. The simile of space evokes a certain understanding of the nature of the mind in the meditator:

> Comprehend the mind to be similar to space.
> Comprehend the mind to be of the nature of space! (3.2.19.)[330]

> The nature of mind is pure like space from the beginning.
> In the process of looking, seeing comes to an end. (3.2.20.)[331]

3.2.21-22. On the gradual path of insight, practitioners first train with a calm, space-like mind. Once they have an insight into its empty nature, they have to extend that understanding to a mind in movement. By examining the thinking mind, meditators have to realize that all objects are merely perceptions, and thus, simply mental movement. Whatever humans know about the outside world -- that is saṃsāra and nirvāṇa -- they know as a mental representation. The section titled "The Realization of Mind, Which Will Bring about an Insight into All Appearances" explains this view. Saraha points out:

> Since the mind alone is the seed of all (possibilities),
> It is this that unfolds saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. (3.2.21)[332]

> Intrinsic in everything projected by the mind
> Is the nature of the Enlightened Master.
> Existence and its evenness (inner emptiness)
> Are of the nature of space.
> Are the sea and its waves distinctly separate? (3.2.22.)[333]

3.2.23. The analogy of water and waves is a very popular one among mahāmudrā teachers.[334] It is used either to illustrate the inseparability of emptiness and manifestation, as in the previous quotation, or the inseparability of calm and moving mind. For the latter case, Tashi

[329] See Chapter 2.3, Features and Content of Saraha's Songs.
[330] Ibid., 190. DE,V. NGA, F.6B, 1.4.
[331] Ibid., 193. DE,V. NGA, F. 6B, 1.4.
[332] Ibid., 196.
[333] Ibid., 196. DE, V. NGA, F 6B, 1.2. Quote # 3.2.43 seems to be a repetition of this verse.
[334] See Chapter Two of this text.

Namgyal quotes Saraha with the following verse. Saraha describes his personal realization in the third person:

> Just as placid water stirred by wind
> Turns itself into billowing waves,
> So does this Archer, the sovereign yogin,
> Cognize the diverse forms of arising from a single source. (3.2.23.)[335]

3.2.24. After the instructions on insight, Tashi Namgyal devotes Chapter Five[336] of the *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams* to the discussion of coemergent wisdom (*sahajajñāna, lhan cig skyes pa'i ye shes*). According to the view of the Kagyü tradition, the mind has simultaneously three aspects: Its essence is empty, its nature is luminous clarity, and it manifests all the qualities of saṃsāra an d nirvāṇ.a.[337] The wisdom, which enables human beings to realize these three coemergent aspects, is believed to be immanent in every being, regardless of whether they use it or not. Or, to say it in Saraha's words: regardless of whether they open their eyes or not.

The author quotes a verse from the *King Dohā* :

> Even when a home is well lit,
> Blind people still remain in darkness.
> Likewise, coemergence encompasses everything
> And remains close to every individual.
> Only the ignorant mind moves far away. (3.2.24.)[338]

Compare this to verses 11 & 12 of the *Treasury of Couplets on Mahāmudrā Instructions,* which is a variation of the same verse:

> Alas, [when] the sun [is] without clouds, light rays can pervade everywhere. However,
> [for those] without eyes, everything appears as darkness.

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335 Namgyal, *Mahāmudra Moonbeams*, 205. TPE (T), V. TSI. F 31B, 1.5.
336 Ibid., Chapter 5, 213-250.
337 Ibid., 213.
338 Ibid., 224. TPE (T), V. TSI, F. 31 B, 1.6. See Guenther's translation in *Ecstatic Spontaneity,* 150: *King Dohā*, verse 3:

> Though the house-lamps have been lit,
> The blind live on in the dark.
> Though spontaneity is all-encompassing and close,
> To the deluded it remains always far away.

Even though co-emergence pervades everything
For the deluded it appears far away.

3.2.25.-26. Tashi Namgyal's gives a long list of "vajra sayings"[339] by mahāmudrā masters to clarify the Kagyü view on coemergence. We find two verses attributed to Saraha:

A sunlike awareness through its pure light illuminates ignorance;
This supreme awareness transforms every experience into sublime bliss,
The way alchemy changes (base metal) into gold. (3.2.25.)[340]

And:

Earth, water, fire, air, and space
Are not distinct from the flavor of their innate coemergence.
He who does not bifurcate nirvāṇa and saṃsāra is stated to (adhere to)
The abiding nature of all-encompassing reality. (3.2.26.)[341]

3.2.27-29. Chapter Six of the *Moonbeams of Mahāmudrā*,[342] explains that a glimpse of mahāmudrā is not sufficient. Practitioners have to stabilize the experience until they can maintain their view during formal meditation as well as throughout activity. These two phases are ordinarily called absorption and post-absorption. Tashi Namgyal clarifies that absorption does not mean "a total absence of mental activity,"[343] but only a cessation of intentional investigation. A meditator maintains absorption with six very "Saharian" methods: "No recollection, no thinking, no thought, no meditation, no examination, but letting the mind be in its natural state."[344] Although attributed to Tilopa, these key terms also play a central role in Saraha's teaching. They correspond to "no memory" and "no meditation" in Saraha's Four Symbols. Tashi Namgyal specifies that instructions on relaxation and no mental activity imply that the meditator

339 Namgyal, *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams* ,lv.
340 Ibid., 231. TPE (T), V. TSI, F. 31 B, 1.7
341 Ibid., 236. TPE (T), V. TSI, F. 34 B, 1.5
342 Chapter Six: "Consolidation of Experience in Meditation: How to Maintain Absorption and Postabsorption," 251-292.
343 Ibid., 259.
344 Tilopa, quoted by Namgyal, Ibid., 264.

maintains "nondiscriminatory mindfulness."[345] Tashi Namgyal cites Saraha extensively in this section. The first set comments on "no thought:"

Abandon thought and the object of thought;
Remain innocent like an infant. (3.2.27.)[346]

The mind cannot be viewed
As being as external or internal reality.
He who abandons thought and the object of thought
Dwells in the mind's natural state,
Singing the song of indestructibility. (3.2.28.)[347]

That from which [intrinsic mind] is detached
Is contemplation
What is there to be contemplated? (3.2.29.)[348]

3.2.30.-31. The second set of quotations comments on the term "no meditation:"

Ah, do not prescribe a contemplation
On the mind's intrinsic reality, which is devoid of any self-nature.
By contemplating the duality of meditation and meditator
One will abandon the enlightened spirit.
Such a person will bring afflictions to himself. (3.2.30.)[349]

For a mind detached from self-nature
There is neither meditation nor a meditator.
The ultimate freedom from hope and fear
Is the indivisible mind. (3.2.31.)[350]

3.2.32. The term "no examination" earns the following commentary by Saraha:

The intrinsic nature [of the mind]
Is unblemished by any mode of discrimination and deficiency.
Being pure from beginningless time,
It cannot be intellectually determined.
To do so would be like provoking a poisonous snake. (3.2.32.)[351]

[345] Ibid.,260.
[346] Ibid., 264.
[347] Ibid.,265.
[348] Ibid.
[349] Ibid.
[350] Ibid.
[351] Ibid., 266. Two further quotes are omitted here for reason of lack of space.

3.2.33.-34. Finally, on point six, "letting the mind be in its natural state," Saraha is a foremost authority and Tashi Namgyal cites him again with two verses:

In keeping the mind in its exact nature
Lies the unobstructed fruit
That is inherent from beginningless time. (3.2.33.)[352]

Do not corrupt the mind's natural purity by an act of concentration
Do not agonize yourself, but settle in tranquility. (2.3.34.)[353]

3.2.35.-36. Relaxing or loosening the mind only leads to success when sustained by non-discriminatory mindfulness, Tashi Namgyal explains in the beginning of this section. In this new light of understanding, he cites again Saraha's well-known verses from the *People's Dohā*:

A mind bound by tension will undoubtedly gain
Its self-release through relaxation. (3.2.35.)[354]

If the mind is under pressure, it succumbs to bondage,
If it is released, distortions will clear by themselves,
For what fetters ignorant people,
Liberates thoughtful people. (3.2.36.)[355]

3.2.37. On meditation without intellectual effort, Saraha advises:

Focusing on any conceived image
Will cloud the path of liberation. (3.2.37.)[356]

3.2.38.-40. Instead of this deviated form of meditation, the manual reiterates the correct meditation method, which is an undistracted awareness of intrinsic reality. Tashi Namgyal repeats insistently the importance of mindfulness. Until mahāmudrā is perfected, meditators have to maintain undistracted mindfulness. He gives several quotations by Saraha on this subject:

O, watch your own self,
For it represents intrinsic reality

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[352] Ibid.
[353] Ibid.
[354] Ibid., 268. Delhi Edition (DE), NGA. F 7, 1. 2. Source: *People's Dohā,* verse 42h. see; Jackson, *Tantric Treasures,* 78. See #3.1.3 and 3.2.14.
[355] Ibid. Source: *People's Dohā,* verse 42. see; Jackson, ibid., 74.
[356] Ibid., 273. Two further verses are quoted. These are repetitions of # 3.2.11. and # 3.2.50.

If unable to watch with an undistracted mind,
You will fail to penetrate the forest of substance
And will lose the gem of true reality,
For a distracted mind is incapable of realization. (3.2.38.)[357]

A mind cleansed of defilement
Coemerges with intrinsic nature;
Such a mind remains free from harmony. (3.2.39.)[358]

By turning the mind into "a nonmind state" [nondiscriminatory],
One will achieve supreme enlightenment. (3.2.40.)[359]

3.2.41.-43. The chapter goes on to discuss the methods of maintaining post-absorption. Saraha teaches the art of maintaining the view with undistracted mindfulness in regards to thoughts or appearances. Meditators should not obstruct the natural flow of the mind stream, but apply their understanding of the empty nature on mind's manifestation:

All things empirically established are empty of any essence;
Even conceptual designation cannot exist
Without interacting causes and conditions.
If one understands the self-released nature of intrinsic reality,
One realizes that it transcends the visual, auditory, and other sensory faculties,
For it is devoid of any self-nature.
Understanding the dual appearances of self and others
As being monistic reality;
Remain fully aware of this without distraction
But abandon clinging lest it afflicts the mind.
Realize peace without attachment to anything. (3.2.41.)[360]

In an advanced stage of meditation, the adept is able to let a thought or perception spontaneously self-release itself into "mind's non-arising simplicity."[361] Saraha teaches:

Intrinsic reality is everywhere,
Before you, behind you,
And each of the ten directions. (3.2.42.)[362]

All that manifests from the mind

[357] Ibid., 274-5. No indication of source is given.
[358] Ibid., 275. Lhalungpa gives as source information: Gampagar Monastery, Tashijong, Dohādzogye, F.8B, 1.6
[359] Ibid., 275.
[360] Ibid., 281. No source is indicated.
[361] Ibid., 282.
[362] Ibid.,Delhi Edition (DE), NGA. F 15B, 1. 5

Contains the identical nature of the Master (Buddha);
Therefore, can waves be distinct from water? (3.2.43.)[363]

Compare this verse to quote #3.2.22. Both English translations seem to have the same Tibetan origin. The list of sources does not allow a definite conclusion at this point, however:

Intrinsic in everything projected by the mind
Is the nature of the Enlightened Master.
Existence and its evenness (inner emptiness)
Are of the nature of space.
Are the sea and its waves distinctly separate? (3.2.22.)[364]

3.2.44. Tashi Namgyal continues his description of the subtle steps of progress on the gradual path of mahāmudrā. The mastery of maintained mindfulness leads meditators to experience thoughts as a spontaneous appearance in emptiness. A thought also disappears again into emptiness. One speaks therefore of "non-arising."[365] Saraha evokes the image of a crow which is released from a ship. It comes back without being forced to, because there is nowhere else to go. The boat in this metaphor symbolizes emptiness from which thoughts arise and return naturally:

This is like a crow that flies far from a boat,
Soaring around and afar,
And that returns to it. (3.2.44.)[366]

The same metaphor appears in the *Body Treasury*[367] and the *Treasury of Couplets on Mahāmudrā Instructions*.[368]

3.2.44.-47. Chapter Seven of the *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams* deals with the risks of deviation that every meditator has to face during his training. Tashi Namgyal distinguishes two

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363 Ibid.
364 Ibid., 196. DE,V. NGA, F 6B, 1.2
365 Ibid., 282.
366 Ibid., Delhi Edition (DE), NGA. F 9, 1. 3. *Mahāmudrā Upadesa Dohā*, verse 93-94; *People's Dohā,* verse 70, in Jackson, *Tantric Treasures*, 93. According to Lhalungpa, the crow symbolizes "a passionate mind that pursues the trail of thought [and] returns to the primordial purity of mind." 283n.
367 Verse 105, Braitstein, *Saraha's Adamantine Songs,* 220.
368 Verse 26, see Chapter 2.5.

general types. The first aberration for a meditator is to conceptualize emptiness. About this, Saraha comments:

> To hold on to nothingness
> Is even more foolish. (3.2.44.)[369]

To avoid this deviation, meditators have to understand that reality comprises interdependent arising as well as emptiness. Both depend on one another, and no aspect should be neglected. Tashi Namgyal advises practitioners to acquire the understanding that ordinary awareness is the foundation of all that appears. Saraha describes the antidote with the following verses:

> Mind should investigate mind regarding pure awareness,
> For it unites all the existential ground, the path,
> And enlightenment into one flavor. (3.2.45.)[370]
>
> To meditate on the inconceivable self-emerging awareness
> Is to meditate on the complete accomplishment. (3.2.46.)[371]
>
> The unobstructed accomplishment is always within oneself.
> So, do not imprison your consciousness by any fear or doubt. (3.2.47.)[372]

3.2.48.-51. The second type of mistake practitioners make is attachment to meditative experiences. They deviate when they cling to the three types of experience, namely bliss, clarity, and non-thought. It is not unusual even for an advanced meditator to crave the reoccurrence of special experiences of the past. Saraha is one among a number of mahāmudrā masters quoted to explain why the desire for good experiences damages the spiritual progress:

> Directing one's mental focus on any images impedes liberation;
> Clinging to these images as superior experiences
> Will drive one into the whirling sphere of existence;
> Discriminating against inferior experiences as such
> Will afflict one with incessant misery. (3.2.48.)[373]

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[369] Namgyal, *Mahāmudrā Moonbeams,* 295.
[370] Ibid., 296.
[371] Ibid.
[372] Ibid.
[373] Ibid., 302.

And again he says:

O, do not crave any sensory gratification,
For this great malaise will distort the state of supreme bliss.
By craving the object of attachment
You might strike the unblemished mind
With the weapon of desire. (3.2.49.)[374]

Finally he advises:

If you should cherish that which delights your heart
While musing about its enchanting quality
You will be afflicted by pain,
Even as small as the husk of the sesame seed. (3.2.50.)[375]

3.2.51.-53. In Chapter Eight[376] the author gives instructions for the very advanced stages of mahāmudrā. Once meditators have sublimated their experiences of bliss, clarity and emptiness, they are apt to see the dimension of emptiness in each and every one of their experiences. In mahāmudrā technical language, this is called "perceiving every thought as the union of clarity and emptiness, and every appearance as the union of appearance and emptiness."[377] Tashi Namgyal states that faith and devotion is crucial for the progress in meditation on this "path of blessing."[378] Chapter Eight is the only chapter, in which Saraha is quoted to pronounce his view of guru devotion:

Receiving the vital instructions from one's guru
Is an adequate means to contemplating
The mind's ungrounded intrinsic reality. (3.2.51.)[379]

This is nonarising [emptiness] from the beginning.
Today realization has dawned [in me]
Through the elucidation of my glorious guru. (3.2.52.)[380]

374 Ibid.
375 Ibid. The same verse is cited on p 273. (# 3.2.37.)
376 Ibid., Chapter Eight "Consolidation of Experience in Meditation," 314-349.
377 Ibid., 315.
378 Ibid., 318.
379 Ibid.
380 Ibid.

Only a holy guru can bring about the understanding
That in emptiness all diverse phenomena
Are one and the same.
This supremely noble one is like the water unto swans.
Pray your homage to him with deep veneration! (3.2.53.)[381]

3.2.54.-55. On this level of meditative accomplishment, meditators have to consolidate their realizations. Tashi Namgyal invites them to test their understanding with various thoughts and emotions until they have "absolute certainty that the intrinsic nature of thoughts consists of the union of clarity and emptiness."[382] He quotes Saraha as the first of a number of the Indian *mahāsiddhas:*

This coemergent nature of mind
is neither of any substance nor nonsubstance.
Thus this Archer always proclaims. (3.2.54.)[383]

Harmonize all that which emerges before you
With its fundamental nature of emptiness. (3.2.55.)[384]

3.2.56.-58. The next section in the mahāmudrā manual instructs meditators to test their most subtle dualistic notions of self-identity until all doubts and assumptions are cleared. The meditator has to be sure that "dualistic perceptions are but a manifestation of mind."[385] Three quotes of Saraha support this point:

Do not claim to meditate on intrinsic reality,
Which is devoid of self-nature.
If one conceives meditation and meditator as duality,
One is abandoning the spirit of enlightenment
And thus will bring much affliction upon oneself. (3.2.56.)[386]

The mind without self-nature
Should detach itself from the duality
Of meditation and meditator,

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[381] Ibid., 319. Tashi Namgyal indicates the *Queen Dohā* as the source for this quotation, without determining the exact verse.
[382] Ibid.
[383] Ibid., 317.
[384] Ibid., 320.
[385] Ibid., 321.
[386] Ibid., 322.

For the ultimate freedom from hope and fear
Is the indestructible mind [vajracitta]. (3.2.57.)[387]

The mind in its great sublime bliss
Is nondual. neither self nor others,
For it perceives intrinsic reality,
Which is before one, behind one, and around one in all ten directions. (3.2.58.)[388]

3.2.59.-64. Tashi Namgyal then goes on to explain that the practitioner has reached a point in the meditation training where it is most conducive to avoid any physical activity. A meditator may chant at the most a little invocation, but not a complete liturgy. Practitioners should go on to examine their mind and find out whether there is any mental event they could label as "not meditational." They have to come to the understanding that there is nothing outside of the intrinsic nature of awareness. Six statements by Saraha lead into a series of about twenty quotes by mahāmudrā masters:

Whoever meditates upon self-emergent, noncogitating awareness
Meditates on spontaneous accomplishment. (3.2.59.)[389]

One neither looks elsewhere for nonconceptual mind
Nor searches for its natural qualities
Except by clearing adverse condition.
This one cannot discover through the tantras and śastras.
A mind without craving and clinging
Remains free from existential defilement. (3.2.60.)[390]

The essential nature of the mind is detached
From either good or bad qualities.
To actualize this no process of inner development is necessary,
For the mind that has abandoned such processes
Is the great sublime bliss. (3.2.61.)[391]

He who turns his mind into a nondiscriminatory state
Will attain supreme enlightenment. (3.2.62.)[392]

[387] Ibid.
[388] Ibid.
[389] Ibid., 324.
[390] Ibid.
[391] Ibid.
[392] Ibid.

When the mind remains firm and immovable
In its natural state, inner liberation
From saṃsāra's conditions will come about. (3.2.63.)[393]

One will not depart from the mode of oneness,
If one understands all these actions
To be an extension of the mind -
Seeing, hearing, touching, and remembering,
Eating and smelling,
Wandering, walking, and sitting,
Talking and gossiping. (3.2.64.)[394]

3.2.65. A highly advanced step on the mahāmudrā path is called self-transformation.[395] Advanced practitioners of the mahāmudrā level of "one taste" need to test their realization in extreme situations. Tashi Namgyal does not go into too much detail about the specific exercises, referring readers to corresponding teachings of the tantric path. He alludes, however, to the practice in "the abode of harmful forces;"[396] to sexual practice (for non-monastic practitioners); and to the practice of utter silence in mountain solitude. The purpose of such extreme behavior is to "arouse deluded thoughts and coarse passions"[397] which the meditator has to realize, as previously, as "transcending awareness."[398] Saraha is quoted with a short verse:

A dualistic thought in its essence is great awareness.
As such it will dry up the ocean of saṃsāra. (3.2.65.)[399]

3.2.65.-66. The self-transformation is elaborated further in the next section of the manual. It is important in both the mahāmudrā and vajrayāna paths to not reject any aspect of the human psyche but to transform everything, including emotions, into wisdom. This is what is meant with

[393] Ibid., 325.
[394] Ibid.
[395] Ibid., 331.
[396] Ibid., 333.
[397] Ibid.
[398] Ibid., 335.
[399] Ibid.

the technical term "Transforming Poison Into Ambrosia,"[400] which Saraha describes with his verses:

> One will not be defiled
> Simply by partaking of sensory pleasures,
> As the petals of the waterlily
> Are unstained by mud.
> He who seeks refuge in
> The root of inmost purity
> Is like a master with a secret formula
> To purify poison
> How can he be harmed by poison? (3.2.65.)[401]
>
> The salty water of the oceans
> Turns to delightful freshness
> Through interaction with the clouds,
> And poison can be turned into ambrosia.
> Likewise a secure mind transforms (self-concern)
> Into genuine concern for others. (3.2.66.)[402]

3.2.67. Chapter Eight concludes with instructions on how to integrate misery, obstructing forces, sickness and death into the mahāmudrā path. Saraha contributes an instruction for dealing with misery and suffering. Compassion, combined with the understanding of emptiness, is the "quintessence of the path."[403] Meditators should cultivate a loving attitude at the end of each meditation. Tashi Namgyal devotes in this manual only a few remarks to this topic. Saraha is quoted with:

> He who seeks emptiness without compassion
> Will not realize the supreme path;
> Yet he who meditates mainly on compassion
> Will not realize liberation.
> He who unifies the two
> Will neither remain in saṃsāra nor in nirvāṇa. (3.2.67.)[404]

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[400] Ibid., 340.
[401] Ibid.
[402] Ibid., 340-1. Delhi Edition (DE), NGA. F 8, 1. 7.
[403] Ibid., 344.
[404] Ibid., 345.

3.2.68.-70. Chapter Nine,[405] the final chapter of this meditation manual, elucidates the theoretical structure of the path -- the four *yogas* of mahāmudrā. The chapter reiterates topics of former chapters, and continues to enrich its explanations with quotations. Saraha is consulted for instructions on postabsorption, one-taste (one flavor), and nonmeditation:

This sacred tree of nondual awareness spreads
Throughout the three planes of the universe.
It blossoms with the flower of compassion
And with the fruit of benevolence.
Such a mind is magnanimous. (3.2.68.)[406]

The holy guru brings forth realization
That all the diverse things
Are one and the same in emptiness. (3.2.69.)[407]

O, do not meditate
On that which is empty of any self-nature
For by conceiving the duality of meditation and meditator
And by clinging to it
You will abandon enlightenment. (3.2.70.)[408]

3.2.71.-73. Saraha's last verses are repetitions of previous quotations, and a final warning against the dangers of attachment:

He who is enchanted with something delightful
And who pursues it passionately
Will indeed be afflicted by miseries,
Even by one small husk of a sesame seed. (3.2.71.)[409]

He who views substantial existence is like a cow;
He who views nothingness is even more ignorant. (3.2.72.)[410]

He should abandon his attachment in all its forms. (3.2.73.)[411]

[405] Chapter Nine: "The Resultant Dawning of Realization," ibid., 350-408.
[406] Ibid., 364.
[407] Ibid., 387.
[408] Ibid., 394.
[409] Ibid., 400. see #3.2.2.
[410] Ibid.
[411] Ibid. See # 3.2.11. and #3.2.67.

Tashi Namgyal concludes his opus with a dedication and a wishing prayer. He dedicates the merit from composing the meditation manual to the enlightenment of all sentient beings and ends with a song of his own. He mentions Saraha as the originator of the mahāmudra tradition; Saraha is the only person that he honors in this prayer. Tashi Namgyal's extensive use of Saraha's quotations, as well as this final tribute to the mysterious meditation master, singles him out as the greatest authority of mahāmudrā.

> The method of meditating on the supreme emptiness of all forms
> Was known to the followers of the great Saraha in ancient India
> And to the lineage of the Takpo Kagyü in this land of snow mountains.
> It was hailed by fair-minded scholars and saints.[412]

This chapter followed the traces of Saraha in the mahāmudrā literature of the Tibetan Karma Kagyü tradition by looking at two particular meditation manuals and their adaptation of Saraha's teachings and style. The authors of the manuals, both from the sixteenth century, acknowledged Saraha's role as a reference for the most advanced stages of this particular spiritual path. The free style of presentation that we have seen in Saraha's songs is completely concealed in the systematic structure of these meditation manuals. We also miss his provocative and engaging way of communicating with his audience. Yet, for the purpose of making mahāmudrā meditation available to a broader public, Tibetan meditation teachers favored the gradual presentation of the path over Saraha's elitist path of instant illumination. By doing so, they may have made an invaluable contribution to the preservation of his spiritual heritage for future generations.

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412 Ibid., 409.

Chapter Four

4. Saraha Today

This chapter attempts to take a closer look at the influence of Saraha on contemporary Western practitioners in the Karma Kagyü Lineage. In the nineteenth century, Jamgön Kongtrul I developed an educational model to guarantee the comprehensive transmission of all major teachings of the Kagyü tradition. This model is still applied today. It calls for a small group of men or women to spend three years in a monastic setting, devoting its time in strict isolation to the practice of transmissions. The transmissions include preliminary practices; guru yoga practices; lojong (*blo sbyong*) mind training; Mahāmudrā meditation; the practice of various tantric deity *sādhana,* and the practice of the six dharmas of Nāropa (more commonly known as the six yogas of Nāropa).

With the spread of Buddhism to the West, this educational model migrated as well. The largest retreat center of this kind is located in the Auvergne, France, where groups of ten to fifteen nuns or monks go through cycles of three-year retreats; with eight such groups, this adds up to about a hundred retreatants at any given time. The spiritual seekers come from various countries, social backgrounds and age groups. Until his passing in 1997, Tibetan monk and meditation master Lama Gendün Rinpoche guided the retreatants. Now, a few of his elder Western students—supported by occasionally visiting lineage holders, such as the Shamarpa and the Karmapa—run the retreats.

Retreatants in France undergo the same traditional Kagyü training as their Tibetan colleagues. They learn to perform tantric rituals and recite liturgical texts in Tibetan. Gellner's "typology of Tantric Buddhist rituals according to predominant function"[413] says there are four types of rituals: (1) soteriological; (2) recurrent rituals of worship; (3) magical empowerment;

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[413] Gellner, *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest*, 146.

and (4) freelance non-liturgical use. Western practitioners in the Kagyü retreat centers follow predominantly the first type of ritual, which focuses on a person's spiritual advancement. Even the second type of ritual, performed on a daily and monthly basis, are motivated by the belief in personal spiritual liberation. Practitioners learn that these rituals are not a worship of an outer, separate and superior deity, but a worship of enlightened qualities inherent in every being. This latter kind of worship is accompanied by the awareness of the inseparability of mind and outer manifestation, and is believed to be a method to stimulate certain desired qualities in the mind of the practitioner. Empowerments—the third category—are performed rarely. The leading teacher of the retreat centers confers an empowerment for each tantric *sādhana* practice only once during the three-year period. The fourth category, which according to Gellner refers to the use of rituals for healing or black or white magic, does not apply to the Western retreat centers.

As part of their educational program, the retreatants learn about Saraha in mainly three forms: (1) as a member of the Mahāmudrā lineage prayer; (2) as a support for meditation and devotion in the short Gampopa guru yoga; and (3) in the context of sacral *gaṇacakra* feast offerings. During these offerings, excerpts of yogic songs occasionally are read in translation as a reenactment of the original *gaṇacakra,* during which yogis of former times would spontaneously sing their songs of realization. These three practices belong to the second type of Buddhist Tantric rituals.

4.1. A Support for Devotional Practice: Saraha as Mahāmudrā Lineage Holder

In the Mahāmudrā preliminary practices, *The Chariot that Takes the Path of the Realized, The Four Preliminary Practices to the Coemergent Mahāmudrā of the Karma*

Kamtsang Practice Lineage,[414] Saraha is listed as one of the Mahāmudrā masters. Praying to the masters of the past and present for blessings is believed to be a powerful expedient means by which the practitioner overcomes conceptual barriers to the realization of Mahāmudrā. The path of essence Mahāmudrā integrates the human capacities for devotion and worship, so that the adept can overcome egotistical barriers to realizing Mahāmudrā, the dimension of egoless ultimate reality.

The extraordinary Mahāmudrā preliminary practice consists of four distinct exercises, each of which includes the repetitions of either a prayer, a mantra, or even a physical exercise such as full-length prostrations.

The fourth practice is called "the Guru Yoga that Swiftly Brings Blessing" and contains a lineage prayer to the masters of Mahāmudrā, starting with the original buddha Dorje Chang, and ending with the so-called root-lama, who is the living teacher of the adept. Saraha is mentioned as the third member of the lineage, after Dorje Chang and Lodrö Rinchen. The first verse of the prayer reads:

> Glorious Dorje Chang who pervades all things,
> Lodrö Rinchen, master of the tenth *bhumi* (bodhisattva level) and
> Saraha, prince of siddhas in the sacred land (India)
> To you I pray, grant me (recognition) of coemergent timeless awareness (*lhan skyes ye shes*).

The preliminary practices, including this prayer, are performed by the retreatants during four meditation sessions a day over the first six months. Thus, a retreatant will recite the prayer about 270 times.[415] The repetition of this prayer should give the practitioner a sense of familiarity

[414] *sgrub brgyud karma kam tshang pa'i phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi sngon 'gro bzhi sbyor sogs kyi ngag 'don 'phags lam bgrod pa'i shing rta zhes bya ba bshugs so*, F 11B, 1. Translation: page 24a.
[415] During five month, retreatants recite it once a day. During the sixth month, the focus is on the guru yoga -preliminary, and they recite it four times a day.

with the lineage members of the past, and this is supported by the study of their hagiographic tales.

It is a common feature of Tibetan hagiographic tales to declare lineage holders to be emanations of venerated masters of the past or of Tantric deities. These declarations have the effect of strengthening the authority of living teachers and of inspiring followers to deepen their devotion. In the Karma Kagyü lineage, the main focus of devotion, apart from one's personal teacher, is the Karmapa, who is the head of the lineage. The Karmapa is believed to have reincarnated in an unbroken succession since Düsum Khyenpa, the first Karmapa and Gampopa's disciple of the twelfth century. For a believing follower, all previous Karmapas live on, in some way, in the present (now seventeenth) reincarnation.

According to the following excerpt of the second Karmapa's hagiographic tale (*rnam thar*), Düsum Khyenpa is the emanation of Saraha, who himself is an emanation of *Chenrezi*, the samboghakāya Buddha of universal compassion. This explanation seeks to ground the Karma Kagyü tradition firmly in Indian origins and even the supramundane level of a sambhogakāya Buddha:

> Karmapa says, "The emanations of *Djowo Chenresi* accomplish the benefit of beings and let them ripen progressively. The emanation of the enlightened mind of *Chenresi* is Saraha. The emanation of the enlightened body is Padma Djungne. The emanation of the enlightened speech is Tampa Gyagar (Padamapa Sangye). The three are one in essence. Düsum Kyenpa is an emanation of Saraha. The patriarchal king Songsten Gampo is an emanation of *Chenresi*. The bodhisattva Lodrö Rinchen (at the origin of the Mahāmudrā transmission and teacher of Saraha) is an emanation of Hayagriwa."[416]

The special relationship between Saraha and the Karmapas is also expressed artistically on scroll paintings (*thang ka*) where the Karmapa's black crown is depicted floating over the head of Saraha. Saraha is generally painted as an Indian yogi holding an arrow.

[416] Excerpt from Lama Lhundrub's notes on Saraha. Unpublished translation of *rnam thar* of Karma Pakshi (1204-1284), *ka.rma pakshi'i rnam thar bsam yas lha'i rnga chen.*

The connection between Saraha and the Karmapa finds its most recent expression in a prayer for the long life of one of the current Karmapas:

> Nirmanakāya of the Sixth Guide of this fortunate kalpa
> And of the Mahāsiddha Saraha,
> Seventeenth body of Düsum Khyenpa –
> May Your lotus feet be stable and Your activity flourish.[417]

4.2. Saraha as Wisdom Being in the Gampopa Guru Yoga

Various forms of guru yoga are practiced in a three-year retreat. In the Mahāmudrā tradition, devotion to the guru or lama (the two terms are used interchangeably in this context) is explained to be an expedient means to realization. Saraha says in the *Speech Treasury*:

> Relying on the Lama, realization comes from the pure accomplishment of the essential instructions,
> And if you worship the Lama, you will accomplish spontaneous highest bliss.[418]

The short guru yoga of Gampopa, called *Naked Seeing of the Dharmakāya, The Guru Yoga of the Dharma King, Physician from Dhagpo (chos rgyal dvags po lha rje'i bla ma'i rnal 'byor chos sku gcer mthong bshugs so*), combines the worship of three gurus in one. Meditators visualize Gampopa, and in Gampopa's heart a figure of Saraha, and within Saraha's heart, the original buddha Dorje Chang. Again, this composition expresses the inseparability of these figures. As a preparatory method of purification, the meditators have to visualize themselves as Vajrayoginī, who represents the fundamental empty nature of each individual. The meditators develop these visualizations progressively while they recite a specific text. Retreatants in the retreat centers in France recite the original Tibetan text, which is given here in translation:[419]

[417] Supplication for the Long Life of His Holiness Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, http://www.dharmadownload.net/pages/english/Natsok/0014_Leksheyling_teaching/leksheyling_teachings_0007.htm. This prayer was not recited in the three year retreat, but is quoted for its clear expression of the link between Saraha and the Karmapas.
[418] *Speech Treasury*, verse 5, trans. Braitstein, *Saraha's Adamantine Songs*, 225.
[419] Karma Ngawang Yonten Gyatso (Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye), *Naked Seeing of the Dharmakaya, chos rgyal dvags po lha rje'i bla ma'i rnal 'byor chos sku gcer mthong bshugs so,* trans. Knowles, 6-9.

> Creating the support for the main practice:
> *Om svabhava shuddha sarva dharma svabhava shuddo ham*/
> Container and contents, the phenomena of subjective and objective clinging, are the state of emptiness. The outer container is the world of Ogmin Khacho.[420] On chojung,[421] lotus, corpse and sun my real being is Vajrayoginī, Mother of the Buddhas: bright red, angry and smiling, she holds hooked knife and skull of blood, adorned with the five symbols, one leg straight and the other bent, in a dancing position, she stands in the natural light of the expanse of timeless awareness and bliss. In the sky in front of her, on white lotus and moon maṇḍala is the essence of the universal lord, the root lama himself in the form of Gampopa, crown jewel of the Kagyupas: Pale yellow, with radiant smile, he gazes with his half closed eyes, on his head is the meditation hat, on his body the three dharma robes, in the mudra of absorption he holds the wishfulfilling jewel, seated in the vajra, he blazes with the splendour of bliss and emptiness in the midst of offering clouds of the five groups of wisdom ḍākinīs. Visualize him as the essence of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. In his heart on lotus, sun, and moon, is the forefather of a hundred siddhas, Saraha, light blue, a brahman in appearance: hair gathered together, he holds a loaded bow and an arrow of wisdom and means. Visualize him with the attributes of a yogic practitioner. In his heart, on lotus and moon, is the universal lord of all families, great Dorje Chang, the color of the sky. The attributes of sambhogakāya complete, he holds vajra and bell, crossed. In the main and intermediate directions, above and below, are the three roots, together with guardians, packed like clouds....

Saraha appears here in a human form: he is described as an Indian *siddha*, holding his characteristic bow and arrow. His only non-human characteristics are his blue body color and his symbolic seat. In a tantric context, the color blue often refers to the sky or space, and could indicate here the spiritual realization of Saraha which is infinite as the sky. His seat of lotus, sun and moon disk also has symbolic meaning. The three elements express that Saraha dwells in purity, wisdom and compassion. The different aspects of his appearance express a status of Saraha being simultaneously worldly and other-worldly.

Once the visualization is established, the practitioners engage in a series of prayers, in which they cultivate certain spiritually favorable mind states. In a first stage they nurse seven

[420] In the Buddhist cosmology, Ogmin Khacho (*'og min mkha' spyod*, literally space enjoyment, inferior to nothing) designates the highest pure land or sambhogakaya realm, of which emanate all nirmanakaya realms. Cornu, *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique,* 37-38.
[421] *chos 'byung*, translated as the origin of all phenomena. It symbolizes emptiness.

virtuous mental attitudes, called the seven branches. They consist of (1) paying homage; (2) making mentally offerings; (3) disclosing and regretting unwholesome actions; (4) rejoicing in wholesome actions; (5) supplicating the gurus to stay accessible; (6) requesting them to teach; and, finally (7)dedicating the accumulated merit.

Then, focusing on the guru(s), the practitioners recite devotional prayers, which are repeated "as much as you can," as the texts instructs them.[422] The prayers should be uttered with "fierce and uncontrived faith and respect,"[423] and lead to a mental state where the practitioner settles "in the natural essence of the inseparable union of your mind and that of the Lama..."[424] Devotion is thus used as a special method to achieve a meditative state of undistracted one-pointedness—the first of the four Mahāmudrā yogas.

The main point of focus in these prayers is Gampopa; however, Saraha is addressed twice in four prayers. The beginning of the first prayer reads:[425]

> Dorje Chang, the sixth one, universal lord of all families, glorious Saraha, forefather of a hundred siddhas, unequalled Gampopa, source of the Kagyus, glorious venerable root lama, union of all of them, three jewels and roots, together with you hosts of guardians, I prostrate to you...

The fourth prayer reads:[426]

> Dorje Chang, universal lord of the whole existence of Existence and Peace, Saraha, forefather of all the best practitioners, unequalled Gampopa, prophesied by the Buddha, [...] I have no other hope than you. Bless me that the confusion of clinging to subject and object be pacified in the expanse (of phenomena, *dbyings*), and that I may realize my own mind to be dharmakāya. My connection is meaningful, lift me out of the pit-hole of saṃsāra and make me equal to you [venerable ones.]

422 Kongtrul, *Naked Seeing of the Dharmakaya*, 16.
423 Ibid., 13.
424 Ibid., 13.
425 Ibid., 11.
426 Ibid., 17-18. Slightly adapted translation.

Practicing a tantric *sādhana* such as this guru yoga requires that the meditators have received an empowerment from an authorized teacher. The empowerment is fourfold[427] and involves an elaborate shrine arrangement and ritual. Its purpose is to lead the practitioner to the realization of the ultimate nature of mind. A much simplified version of the fourfold empowerment is generally found at the end of each guru yoga. Here, it consists simply of a mental process by which the practitioner tries to refresh the meditation experience of the actual empowerment ritual. This experience, also called "blessing," leads into the completion phase (*rdzogs rim*) of meditation at the end of a *sādhana.*

The guru yoga of Gampopa has three elements of empowerment referring to the three gurus that are visualized. After visualizing Gampopa as he confers symbolically the four empowerments, the practitioner goes on to receive "the special transfer of blessing" (*khyad par byin rlabs*) from Saraha. This is visualized as the text instructs:[428]

> Five rays of [colored] light belonging to the arrowhead of the bow and arrow loaded by the Great Brahmin [Saraha] touch my heart, immediately breaking it open and destroying my ego clinging. The set of five wisdom drops come directly from the heart of Dorje Chang as balls of the five lights of primordial awareness, pure and free of the husk of ignorance....

The empowerment-phase ends with a visualization and meditation on the inseparability of the enlightened mind of the guru(s) with that of the practitioner. The final meditation instructions tell the practitioner: "Your mind settled, stay as long as you can in the basic nature of your mind, a state that is unchanging, like the sky."[429] These instructions reflect typical instructions by Saraha with their emphasis on non-movement, on the recognition of the original

[427] The four empowerments were explained in the introduction to Mahāmudrā, Chapter One.
[428] Kongtrul, *Naked Seeing of the Dharmakaya*, trans. adapted, 20.
[429] Kongtrul, *Naked Seeing of the Dharmakaya,* 21.

mind, and their use of the sky-simile. They are however not exclusively "Sarahaien," rather, they have become classical Mahāmudrā meditation instructions in guru yoga *sādhanas.*

4.3. A Scenario: *Gaṇacakra* Feast Offering: Reenactment of a Yogic Practice

On the full moon day in the retreat centers, all practitioners gather in the communal shrine room and perform a *gaṇacakra* feast offering together, as part of a guru yoga or a deity practice.[430] They have prepared torma (*gtor ma*) offerings[431] and tsok (*tshogs*) offerings[432] on the altar. They are dressed in dark red Tibetan-style robes, their heads are shaved. They take their respective seats in the shrine room in accordance with their role in the ritual. The three most important roles are that of the Dorje Lopon (*rdo rje slob dpon*), the Umdze (*u mdzad*), and the Chopon (*mchod dpon*). The Dorje Lopon is the head of the ritual, the Umdze leads the chants, and the Chopon is in charge of the offerings, which have to be manipulated according to the ritual.

The retreatants recite the Tibetan text, following the rhythm that the Umdze creates with the dry beat of cymbals. At certain times in the recitation, music is used. The practitioners play various Tibetan flutes and horns, drums and bells.

Towards the end of the ritual—in general, before the empowerment section—as seen in the Gampopa ritual, the practitioners perform the *gaṇacakra* feast offering. The previously prepared offerings are distributed. The first portion is offered to the guru (or the deity) and placed on the shrine; the second portion is shared by the practitioners; and a left-over portion is

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430 For more on *ganacakra* feast offerings, see Gellner, *Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest,* 297, 303.
431 Tib. *gtor ma,* Skt.*balingta*: Ritual offerings prepared in specific shapes from eatable dough with butter ornaments.
432 Tib. *tshogs-puja*, Skt *ganacakra* These are food and drink offerings, which will be consumed by the practitioners during the ritual. "For Tibetan Buddhists, the *ganacakra* is a sacramental meal after a Tantric ritual." Gellner, 297.

offered at the end outside for invisible beings. Sharing the offerings, which include alcohol and meat, among the practitioners has the character of a feast.

Gaṇacakra practice aims at creating an experience of sacred space. Through the liturgical performance and the accompanying meditations, the practitioners have transformed their perception into an awareness of the intrinsic purity of all phenomena, generally called pure view (*dag snang*). The pure view embraces the environment, the spiritual companions and teachers, one's own person, and the feast substances, and it should lead ultimately to the experience of omnipresent enlightenment in this world. It is also a practice of powerful spiritual bonding, which is "an intrinsic, if normally invisible, component of a Vajrayāna community experience."[433] The Western practitioners of a three-year retreat learn from their Tibetan teacher that originally, on the occasion of a *gaṇacakra* feast, yogis of the past sang spontaneous songs of realization. As an attempt to reconnect with this practice of their spiritual forefathers, retreatants read translated songs or hagiographic tales of Indian and Tibetan masters. Some might hear the story of Saraha and the radish stew for the first time, the memory of which will stay irrevocably connected with Saraha. The retreatants may hear and contemplate verses such as these before resuming the ritual:

> Just as the lion's roar in the jungle
> That causes terror for all the animals
> Brings the lion cubs running with joy,
> When this primordial, unborn bliss is taught,
> It terrifies the deluded and confused
> But the fortunate ones' hairs stand on end with delight. (Saraha)[434]

[433] Pettit, "Tibetan Buddhism in the Diaspora."
[434] Saraha, *Mahāmudrā Upadeśa Dohā*, Verse 17-18; see Chapter 2.5.

4.4. Saraha's Impact on Western Practitioners Today

Western spiritual seekers come to a Tibetan three-year retreat to learn meditation and fulfill their yearning for freedom, however vaguely that might be defined by each of them personally. They commit themselves to the tradition of the Tibetan Karma Kagyü School, accepting to learn the specific cultural form in which Buddhism is presented to them. Their situation is characterized by a number of barriers they must overcome to submerge themselves in the tradition they have chosen. They have to undertake the study of literary Tibetan, a challenging task even though English translations of the liturgies and commentaries are provided as a support. They have to familiarize themselves with the tradition and its representatives, especially masters that are a focus point for devotional practice. Not having grown up in a culture where Saraha, Gampopa or Karmapa are present in history and religion, they have to establish a relationship through study, imagination, and transference of devotion of contemporary teachers to those of the past.

The average practitioner in the retreat centers in Kundrol Ling, France has, however, little or no background knowledge of *siddha* literature, tantric systems or meditation traditions other than their particular School. Their academic study of these domains is not encouraged by their Tibetan or Western teachers, who argue that ultimate reality cannot be experienced through intellectual activity, only through direct cognition in meditation. This approach is particularly emphasized in the Mahāmudrā tradition of the Karma Kagyü School.

This attitude, which leads to a neglect of study, is partly responsible for the lack of expertise in the Tibetan language. Practitioners struggle with the understanding of the Tibetan texts they recite. These texts were composed as a roadmap of meditation and visualization instructions. The inability to understand these instructions and their subtleties diminishes the

quality of practice. Whether these omissions can be attenuated by genuine efforts in cultivating devotion and meditation cannot be easily evaluated. Meditation manuals such as the *Mahāmudrā, The Ocean of Definite Meaning*, which are not used as liturgies but as commentarial texts for meditation instructions, have been translated into the various mother-languages of the practitioners and are used most of the time instead of original Tibetan texts for personal practice.

Given this background, six practitioners were asked to evaluate their personal knowledge of Saraha. The practitioners, each of whom have completed two three-year retreats, were posed the question: "What impact has Saraha had on your spiritual path?"

Four of them identified Saraha based on hagiographic tales, in particular the tale of the yogi who did not forget his radish stew during twelve years of meditative absorption. When asked how literally they took this story, one person said:[435]

> I do not try to judge those stories, if they are true or not. These beings were on another plane. Lama Gendün in retreat told us about two immaculate conceptions among the Karmapas. Who are we to judge?

One person associated Saraha with the two female companions, the radish girl as well as the female arrow smith. This retreatant recalled a statement attributed to Saraha after having joined the female arrow smith:[436]

> Seit ich kein Mönch mehr bin [...], bin ich erst wirklich Mönch
> [Since I am no monk any longer, I am a real monk]

These answers demonstrate that even today, the hagiographic tales about Saraha have retained their power as educational tools. They trigger the fantasy, humor and inspiration of practitioners across cultural and temporal borders. For one person, after leaving the three-year retreat, Saraha was forgotten for all but the radish stew story!

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[435] Khedrub
[436] Drime Eberhard

All retreatants recognize that Saraha did not play an overtly important role in their retreat program. One person summarizes the situation as follows:[437]

> Even though Saraha is the very root of the Mahāmudrā transmission in our Kagyü lineage, very little detail about him or his own teaching is mentioned, in fact, as in retreat we relied more on later meditation-guides of Tibetan masters. For years we came across Saraha's sayings only in fragments as they popped up in the commentaries on the Mahāmudrā transmission, but these did never quote longer passages. Nevertheless, short as those quotes were, they were very inspiring. In fact, they felt always fresh and direct. I would go that far to say that they felt as immediate in their expression of the actual experience as a straight slap in one's face.

Half of the interviewed people developed personal initiatives beyond the retreat program to discover Saraha. They read his dohās in English, or translated Saraha's texts on their own. They also practiced the Gampopa guru yoga discussed previously.

Marco Tondrub says:

> Later on, I managed to have a deeper study of the people's *dohā* along with its commentary, which is so inspiring for meditation practice, since, in fact, it covers all aspects of the path, but [the *dohā*] does not take the aspect of a treatise, with points, sub-points and their sub-points, as it is the case for later Tibetan works.This song seems to show directly what is meant, bypassing lengthy scholastic explanations.
>
> For me, his songs contain the very essence of liberated mind, in the most direct expression possible and still inspiring us nowadays to dare stepping in his footsteps

Stephane Drime continued his studies of the Karma Kagyü tradition (or Karma Kamtsang, as he calls it alternately) in his function as a librarian. He expresses his appreciation for Saraha using the metaphor of a foot, which supports without being recognized for its function:

> My feeling with Saraha is [that he is] something like a foot. I don't pay really attention [to] the presence of my foot until the day I realize, without a foot I can not move. If I look at my lineage, Saraha is almost everywhere in the *sarma*

[437] Marco Tondrub

> transmission of Karma Kamtsang. He's in the *kabab zhi*,[438] and belongs to the six yoga lineage. He belongs to several transmissions of important *yidam* of Marpa, such as *Buddhakapala* and *Guhyasamaja*. He is very important for all the Mahāmudrā transmissions of Maitreya, the second important lineage in the Kagyü transmission. So, although I never pronounce his name, his presence does not depart my practices and prayers, and his meditation instructions are like a network of advice.

The three-year retreat is also a place of education for modern reincarnate lamas (*sprul sku*). At the age of 20, the fourth Dilyag Sabchu Rinpoche entered such a retreat. His experience of Buddhist tradition differs from Western practitioners in so far as he was exposed to Buddhist education from a very young age. Traditionally, reincarnate lamas live in the monastery beginning in early childhood, when they begin a particularly rigorous training. Thus, Sabchu Rinpoche had the opportunity of learning about Indian Mahāmudrā masters in a way that no Western practitioner has. He explains:

> My first encounter with [Saraha] was an old mural painting of him in our monastic assembly hall, when I was eight. He looked very similar to two other paintings on the side walls. Later I learned, those were Tilo and Naro. In my early studies, [Saraha] was often seated in the garlands of lineage holders during some tantric initiation I received from my teachers.
>
> Systematic Mahāmudrā is not part of theoretical Buddhist philosophical education; neither is it in monastic training, nor in ritual training. It was only after I chose to enter a three-year retreat that I happened to come closer to him and his work.

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[438] *bka' 'bab bzhi*, "The four lines of transmitted precepts," also referred to as *bka bzhi brgyud pa*. "The lineages of the Four Transmitted Precepts". Tony Duff, *Illuminator Tibetan English Dicitonary* explains: "Tilopa received four main sets of teachings called the *bka' bzhi* or *bka' babs bzhi* "four lines of transmitted precepts" q.v. 1) The lineage of the precepts of the Great Seal came through Vajrapani, Saraha, Lohipa, Dharikapa, Ding-gi-pa, to Tilopa. 2) The lineage of the precepts of the Father Tantras came through Guhyapati, Lord of the Tenth Bhumi Lodro Rinchen, Nagarjuna, and Matangipa to Tilopa. 3) The lineage of the precepts of the Mother Tantras came Sumati Samantabhadri, Tanglopa, Shinglopa, and Karnaripa to Tilopa. 4) The lineage of the precepts of Luminosity came through Vajrapani, Dombi Heruka, Vinasa, Lawapa, and Indrabhuti to Tilopa. A Tibetan source for details is the extensive set of texts, *bka' brgyud gser phreng* "Golden Rosary of the Kagyus" that detail the historical aspects of the Kagyu lineage."

Concerning Saraha’s particular style as a Mahāmudrā teacher, Sabchu Rinpoche evokes two characteristics: the emphasis on naturalness, and the outer form of the teachings being songs.

> Saraha’s *dohās* are [among the] most invigorating & enlightening teachings I can think of. I was fascinated with his idea of streaming the teachings in such a natural way.
>
> [...] The [*dohās*] are completely immersed in the true nature of self, so there is no second nature. That is *the* only way, so it is so natural. That is why I think many teachings are short and penetrating.
>
> Many of them are songs. Singing is a very strong cultural part of India since a long time. Many *vedic* stanzas were sung, not recited. Personally I find that very interesting…because we don’t sing to give teachings anymore. But on the other side, one prominent Nyingma master told me that *siddhas* still do exist and they are in the midst of Hindu babas and yogis you see on the banks of the river Ganges. I believe that, too.

Sabchu Rinpoche calls Saraha a "legendary" example in the transmission of Mahāmudrā. He is the only practitioner among the interviewed who relates spontaneously to Saraha as a person worthy of worship. "Personally I think of him as highly as Vajradhara," he said.

Given the small number of practitioners interviewed, it is dangerous to generalize about the knowledge and impact of Saraha. But this natural expression of worship might be an indicator of the cultural differences of the spiritual path in the East and in the West. A Tibetan practitioner grows up with pictures and stories, and a community that gives the living example of devotional practice. For a Westerner, these mental attitudes have to be consciously, maybe even artificially, cultivated, which involves in most cases not only the construction of a Buddhist mode of thinking, but also the de-construction of a predominantly Christian mental framework. The analysis of this challenge is, however, not the subject of this text.

Conclusion

This thesis began by saying that Saraha was an enigma who made a great impact on the mahāmudrā tradition of Tibet. In the four chapters of this text, I have attempted to elucidate this statement.

Chapter One introduced Saraha as we know him through various tales: a colorful, charismatic person and a yogi-poet of great influence. No scholar can state with certainty a historical fact about his life. The information in Tibetan hagiographic tales is sometimes confusing and contradictory. And yet, these tales have kept the image of Saraha, the mahāmudrā master, alive in the minds of practitioners for more than eight centuries.

Chapter Two focused on his literary heritage. The Tibetan Derge canon preserves twenty-six texts attributed to Saraha, and the Indian Caryāpāda contains four of his songs. I introduced each of them briefly and indicated which of these texts has already received the attention of scholars and translators. Then I took a closer look at the translations available today, and analyzed the content and style of Saraha's poetry. The chapter concluded with my own translation of a song on mahāmudrā instructions by Saraha.

Chapter Three followed Saraha to Tibet. Two manuals of the mahāmudrā tradition of the Kagyü tradition served as examples of how Saraha's teaching was preserved. The authors of the manuals cited Saraha extensively and integrated him into the gradual approach of mahāmudrā. Even though his elitist style and unsystematic approach was thereby slightly distorted, he is considered a foremost authority in the tradition.

In Chapter Four we found Saraha in the West. The Karma Kagyü retreat center in the Auvergne, France, served as the backdrop for an examination of Saraha's role in the training of Western mahāmudrā practitioners. I presented Saraha as an element of several practices,

including mahāmudrā preliminaries, various prayers, a guru yoga and *gaṇacakra* feast offerings. The chapter concluded with statements by contemporary practitioners from Europe and Nepal about their personal impression of Saraha. Enigmatic as he might be, Saraha left an imprint in their minds, even if it was just the vague memory of his radish stew episode. More importantly, he is still known and venerated as a mahāmudrā authority.

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